192 PAGES

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

MAY 1990
$2.50 U.S./$2.95 CAN.

WALTER JON WILLIAMS
Elegy for Angels and Dogs

ISAAC ASIMOV

BRUCE McALLISTER

PAT MURPHY
Bones

05
36009
0 387167 6

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AVON

"His eclectic enthusiasm adds sparkle to his new collection of stories."
The New York Times

"Fantastic concepts and characters...Zelazny is a clear, limber stylist and a generous, thoughtful soul."
People

ROGER ZELAZNY
FROST & FIRE

Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author • A collection of his finest short stories and essays

AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MAY 1990 FROM AVON BOOKS

$3.50 ($4.95 in Canada)

AVON BOOKS
The Hearst Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TOR PROUDLY PRESENTS

CHIMAERA'S COPPER

The bewitching sequel to
DRAGON'S GOLD and SERPENT'S SILVER

by

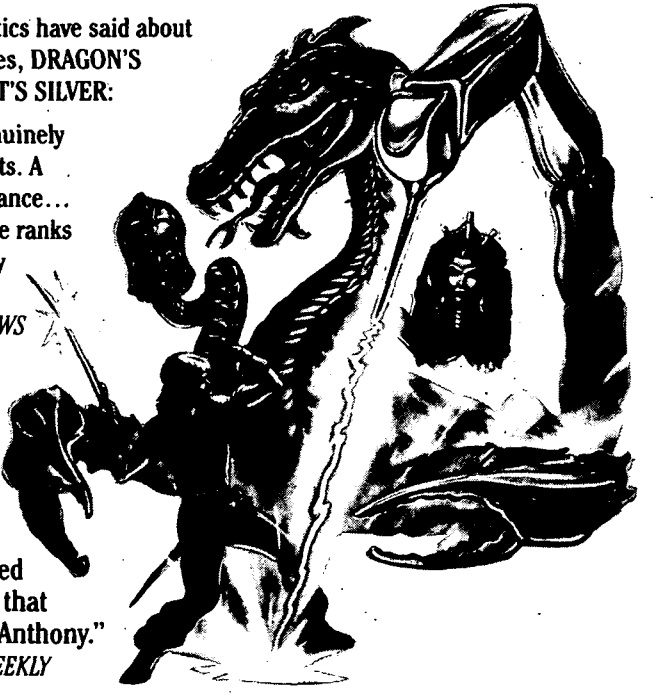
PIERS ANTHONY and ROBERT E. MARGROFF

Here's what the critics have said about the previous volumes, DRAGON'S GOLD and SERPENT'S SILVER:

"Spiced by some genuinely frightening moments. A persuasive performance... that should swell the ranks of Anthony's already huge audience."
—*KIRKUS REVIEWS*

"Action, character development, and romance blend nicely in this captivating tale."
—*KLIATT*

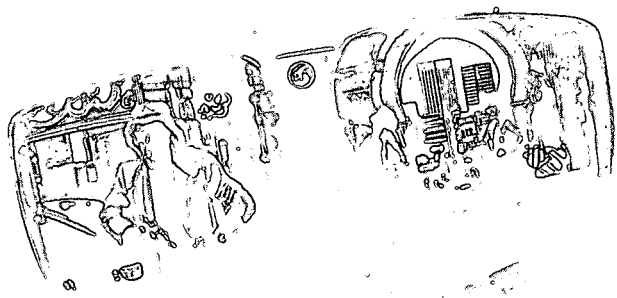
"Possesses the added irony and realism that one expects from Anthony."
—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*



CHIMAERA'S COPPER shows the mysterious unfolding of more of the prophecy of Mouvar—"Until from the Seven there be One, Only then will his Task be Done." Kelvin Knight Hackleberry, the Round-ear hero of the series, and his father, John Knight, find themselves shunted into an unknown frame of reality where amphibian warriors offer human sacrifice to the legendary Chimaera. CHIMAERA'S COPPER is the exciting and engaging continuation of the tale of Kelvin, an unlikely hero in the wildest of all possible multiverses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CIRCUIT'S EDGE



Another Killing in the Budayeen

"Lately, when there's a fresh stiff in the Budayeen, it seems like everybody wants to talk to *me* about it. And somebody wants to make me the next one....

"That's what it means to be a private eye in this pit of crime and corruption in the Middle East of the 23rd century. A friend to hustlers, lowlifes, thieves. With a brain wired to accept snap-in personality modules ("moddies") and software add-ons ("daddies") that could save my life. Or end it."

CIRCUIT'S EDGE. The stuff of tonight's nightmares, in the ghetto of tomorrow. Available for MS-DOS computers—coming this summer for Amiga.

See your local retailer, or call 1-800-227-6900 to order.

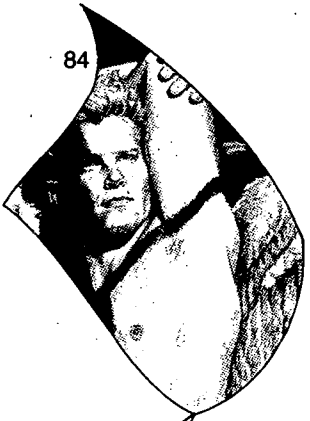
Based on the Stories and Novels of George Alec Effinger

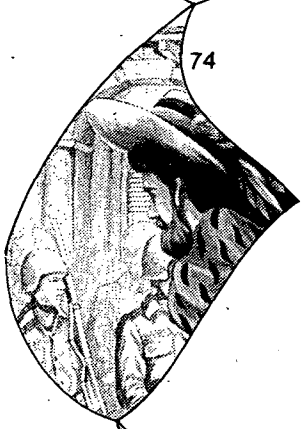
1989 Hugo & Nebula Award Winner

INFOCOM

© 1990 Infocom. MS-DOS is a reg. trademark of Microsoft Corp. Amiga is a trademark of Commodore-Amiga.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION® MAGAZINE

Vol. 14 No. 5 (Whole number 156)
May 1990
Next issue on sale
May 1, 1990

Novellas

18 Bones — Pat Murphy
104 Elegy for Angels and Dogs — Walter Jon Williams

Short Stories

68 Fault-Intolerant — Isaac Asimov
74 Mighty Fortresses — John Maddox Roberts
84 Angels — Bruce McAllister
94 Where Are You, Guy de Maupassant, Now That We Need You? — F.M. Busby

Departments

4 Editorial: Spokesman — Isaac Asimov
9 Letters
16 Neat Stuff — Matthew J. Costello
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Cover art for "Elegy for Angels and Dogs" by Gary Freeman

Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director
Gardner Dozois: Editor
Sheila Williams: Managing Editor
Joel Davis: President & Publisher
Terri Czeczko: Art Director

Published every 28 days with a special issue at year end by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.50 per copy ($2.95 per copy in Canada). 1 year subscription $33.95 in the United States and U.S. possessions.In all other countries $38.65, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566. For back issues send $3.50 to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1990 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send change of address to IAsfm, Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN 0162-2188.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

SPOKESMAN

I have just returned (as I write this) from the World Science Fiction Convention (Noreascon III), which was held in Boston over the Labor Day weekend of 1989. It was a special convention since it was the fiftieth anniversary of the very first World Science Fiction meeting which was held in New York City during the Independence Day weekend in 1939.

It was a special convention for me, too, because I had attended that first World SF Convention as a teen-age beginner, having sold three stories by that time. The third story, "Trends," was my first to appear in *Astounding Science Fiction* and it appeared just a few weeks before that first Convention.

I had mixed feelings about the golden anniversary of the World SF Convention and of my own literary life. There was obviously reason to be somber. You can't look back on fifty years of professional life without realizing that one can only attain such a landmark by moving past what might be called the prime of youth.

Let's face it. I can sense the danger, somewhere out there on the distant horizon, of becoming elderly. Since I have spent all these years writing steadily and have still not come anywhere near writing all I *want* to write, the thought that the time left me is shrinking is a rather unpleasant one.

On the other hand, there is cause for jubilation, too; much more cause for that than for depression, for I have survived to look back on fifty years of accomplishment, both for science fiction and for myself. And, looking back, it seems to me I have spent my life well.

Chiefly, I am glad that I have never forgotten my literary roots or, worse, deliberately turned my back on them. To many, the act of reading science fiction (even more so, *writing* it) is an aberration of youth, something to be outgrown in the years of maturity.

Thus, once in the long-gone days when I was teaching in the School of Medicine, a graduate returned to visit after several years and said to me, "Hi, are you still a science fiction writer?"

"Yes," I answered, "and are you still a doctor?"

Nor am I one of those who, while writing what is recognized as science fiction, earnestly deny that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are doing so. They are writing "literature," I presume. Or one of those who prefer to give science fiction another name such as "speculative fiction," or "future-oriented fiction," or who knows what?—Not at all. Science fiction is what I have written; science fiction is what I write; science fiction is what I will write as long as I live.

Nor am I impressed by those who consider science fiction a "ghetto" and who feel that the mere fact that they are seen as science fiction writers means that they are not taken seriously, that they are not reviewed in the New York *Times* and in the *New Yorker*, that they are buried in bookstore shelves behind the cat's box, that they are perceived, with a sneer, as purveyors of nonsense.

In the first place, it's not true. A number of good science fiction writers have written outside the field. I think of L. Sprague de Camp, Poul Anderson, Fred Pohl, and others. I myself, as is well-known, have written on almost every subject. In fact, my science fiction, even including all the SF anthologies I have edited, makes up only one-third of my total output. The rest consists of mysteries and various kinds of non-fiction, from large half-million-word tomes on science, to history books, to humor and satire, all the way down to composing (and publishing) limericks of dubious morality.

No one thinks any the worse of my non-SF because of my SF history. Some reviewers and some cor-

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Managing Editor
IAN RANDAL STROCK:
Assistant Editor
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Director
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Director
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights
FLORENCE B. EICHIN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
VEENA RAGHAVAN
Director, Special Projects
CHRISTIAN DORBANDT:
Newsstand Marketing and Promotion
DENNIS JONES:
Newsstand Operations Manager
ELIZABETH BEATTY
Circulation Director
BRIAN McKEON:
Corporate Business Manager
A. BRUCE CHATTERTON
Advertising Director
LISA FEERICK:
Advertising Coordinator
IRENE BOZOKI:
Classified Advertising Manager

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

CARL BARTEE
Vice President
Manufacturing

JOE DEFALCO
Vice President
Finance

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" on the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

respondents have objected to one book or another and found fault with it, but never once, never *once* to my knowledge, did any of them ever denounce me for venturing into uncharted fields just because I was a science fiction writer. I have written whole books on something as "science-fictiony" as *Extraterrestrial Civilizations* and something as out of the way as *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* and had them reviewed on their merits or demerits, but and without one extraneous sneer.

To be sure, because my work is so heavily non-SF and so heavily "straight non-fiction," I suppose I could experience the temptation of forgetting science fiction, and calling myself a "science writer" or a "futurist," and overlooking deliberately, for reasons of prestige and respectability, my science fiction.

I have never experienced that temptation. When I am asked to do a book on science or an essay on some futuristic topic, I have no hesitation in playing the role of science writer or futurist, because I am that *also*, but my SF is always front-and-center just the same.

When someone meets me who doesn't know of me (and there are billions of those in the world) I am often asked what my line of work is. I answer, "I am a writer." Almost inevitably, this produces the further question, "What do you write?" To which my answer is, invariably, "I write almost anything, but I am chiefly known for my science fiction."

In fact, I have achieved prestige and respectability despite my supposedly ignominious beginnings, and I use it to *serve* those beginnings. I not only conceive it my duty to help science fiction directly, by having my name (for what it's worth) on this magazine, and on various books by young science fiction writers, and on dozens of anthologies, but I also conceive it my duty to promote science fiction to those who don't know about it, or who feel above it.

I consider myself an unofficial spokesman for science fiction, and I have lectured on its importance to an audience of some four thousand at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; I have spoken on the subject on radio and television; I have written on the subject in magazines of general circulation. Someone once referred to me, jokingly, as science fiction's "apostle to the Gentiles," but I don't laugh when I repeat that. It's what I feel myself to be. It's what I *want* to be.

Why? Because I think science fiction is *important*; I think it is *crucial*. I know very well that a great deal of it is just froth, and is just written and read for amusement, but some of it *isn't*. Some of it is vital to human advancement.

Am I grandiose? Am I indulging in braggadocio? Well, listen to this. Every single one of the early investigators into rocketry, from Robert Goddard to Willy Ley, was led into the field by the excitement of reading H. G. Wells. Every sin-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

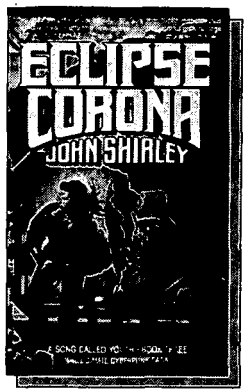
Questar
SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

WHO WILL SAVE THE WORLD FROM *ECLIPSE CORONA*?

The long-awaited third volume in John Shirley's epic Cyberpunk trilogy, *A Song Called Youth* is here at last!

Second Alliance has Europe in a death grip, and New Resistance is not in place to fight back. It's just the beginning of ECLIPSE CORONA, a master plan of genocide designed to wipe out entire races and make room for subhuman slaves. All hope depends on a girl who knows nothing—but whose brain knows too much. And neither the SA nor NR realizes that an orbital psychotic is about to solve all of Earth's problems by killing...

"One of SF's most singular talents...Shirley's apocalyptic, pop-inflected, rock-driven vision attains a new degree of clarity against gritty footage of a war-torn near-future Europe." —William Gibson, author of *Neuromancer*



"John Shirley's prophet-in-the-cyberwilderness voice deserves high billing among the best." —Roger Zelazny, author of the *Amber* series

Cover art by Barclay Shaw
0-445-20510-5/$4.95
(In Canada: $5.95)

Also read:
Eclipse
0-445-20506-7/$3.50
(In Canada: $4.50)

Eclipse Penumbra
0-445-20508-3/$3.95
(In Canada: $4.95)

At Bookstores Everywhere

Also this month: *MORIGU: THE DEAD* by Mark Perry

Margawt, the Morigu, continues his neverending fight against the shadowlord as the battle begun in *Morigu: The Desecration* rages on.

The warlords of the alliance seek to strike back at their enemy, but it is the Morigu, Nature's passion, who is destined to soothe the shattered land with a sea of blood. They are warriors of a holocaust without boundaries, war with no quarter—for the prize is the living soul of the world.

Cover art by Gary Ruddell
0-445-20644-6/$4.95
(In Canada: $5.95)

At Bookstores Everywhere

A WORD FROM Brian Thomsen

Without television our lives would be radically different. We would never have been treated to the up-to-the-minute/you are there reportage of Vietnam, the moon landing, or Watergate.

He who controls the information controls the masses. This is just one of the the issues in John Shirley's *A Song Called Youth* trilogy, which climaxes with ECLIPSE CORONA, and it's the next terrifying step after Orwell's Big Brother TV.

Television has always been a part of my life, whether it's a PBS adaptation of "The Lathe of Heaven" or just another "Star Trek" rerun. When you see me around, let's talk about the upcoming crop of movies for the summer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gle one of the early workers in robotics was led into the field by the excitement of reading the robot stories published by *Astounding* in the 1940s. (My well-known modesty prevents me from saying more on this subject.) Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke are two others whose works were inspirational enough to accelerate advance in certain fields.

This is not to say that Wells contributed any material advance in rocketry, or that I did in robotics. Our role was inspirational. We acted as catalysts, rousing excitement in the breasts of others who then went out and *did* do something. Undoubtedly rocketry and robotics would have come about anyway, but perhaps not quite as rapidly. Such possibilities found a warm home in science fiction, when hard-headed practical men would have nothing to do with them. They were kept safe and alive till those arose who could bring them to fruition.

What does that mean for the future? We are facing a series of horrible problems. There is overpopulation and all that stems from it—the depletion of resources; the pollution and poisoning of air, water, and soil; the disappearing ozone layer; acid rain; the threatening greenhouse effect. There are the defects in world society that lead to war and threats of war, to terrorism, to alienation, to the drug pandemic.

From such things, human beings are too apt to escape by denial, by refusing to admit the problems exist; or to escape by referral, to suppose that some supernatural influence will take care of everything; or to escape by despair, to the decision that nothing will help.

It is the special province of the science fiction writer—the *serious* science fiction writer—to deal with such problems. That doesn't mean he has to place his stories in the world of 1999. My own *Foundation* novels are placed twenty thousand years in the future, but the political problems they deal with are recognizably those of today, seen the more clearly, perhaps, because they are placed against an unfamiliar background.

What's more, science fiction writers must suggest solutions, too. These may prove neither practical nor possible, but there must be thought on the subject. Ben Bova once said that science fiction writers were scouts sent out by humanity to explore the future and bring back the reports, and he was right. (I wish *I* had been smart enough to think of saying that.)

So there you are. Science fiction writers have an enormous task and a vital duty to perform, and it is for that reason that I keep trying to sell SF to the rest of the world. Nor do I think science fiction owes me anything for this. Quite the reverse. My own debt *to* science fiction is incalculable. Science fiction has brought me not only a moderate fame and fortune, but it has given meaning to my life. I can never be sufficiently grateful to it. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Doctor Asimov,

I hope you will publish this letter. I am writing it in praise of your wonderful magazine.

I come from Great Britain. A sad and uncultured land . . . or until recently. You see, up until now, *IAsfm* has not been on sale in our news agents. Now everything is changed. *IAsfm*, for the first time, is on sale. How can I describe how I felt on seeing it? Words almost fail me. There was I innocently browsing in a news agent's looking for nothing in particular, when wonder upon wonder, there it was. A copy of *IAsfm*! I could not believe my eyes. Was I seeing things? Was this a figment of my all too vivid imagination? No! It was really there. Just one, mind you. But one is enough. Barging aside the man next to me I grabbed it quick, in case he turned out to be another disbelieving SF fan. He looked at me as if I was mad. I didn't care. Feverish with excitement I went to the checkout, paid for my prize and rushed out into the street. A handy bench was nearby. I sat down and read. That is it. I just read. Before I knew it a whole hour and a half had gone by. I never even noticed. I was absolutely captivated.

Somebody once said: "I was blind and did not know." That is exactly how I felt. As if I had been living on bread and water, never even suspecting the existence of steak, of wine. Then out of the blue being sat down in front of a gourmet meal. Let me tell you, I made a right pig of myself. New science fiction stories! *Good* new science fiction stories! How I have been starved of them. To have a supply of brand spanking new, high quality, short stories. Simply incredible! Needless to say I have placed a regular order with my local news agent. I'll be reading *IAsfm* every month now. Now that you are finally, at long last here.

Better late than never. It's great to see you. Well, that is the first part of this letter. Now comes the second. I am just as surprised to see you publish poetry in your magazine. As it happens I write poetry, some of which, occasionally, I sell. Reading your magazine has inspired me to write a few verses of my own, which may just be acceptable to you.

Once again my thanks, and good to see you (at long, long last).

Richard Christie
Stoke
Plymouth
Great Britain

We are delighted to be able to bring the blessings of civilization and culture to a land so deficient

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in each that it is compelled to use our American language instead of inventing one of its own. We are pleased.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac,

In your reply to Ben Johnson's letter decrying the unrealistic attention paid to sex in fiction, I think you missed the main point. The reason that sex must sometimes be described more graphically and more frequently than other equally normal processes, such as bowel movements (to use Mr. Johnson's example) is that sex (the argument is similar for violence, by the way) is much more likely to be a pivotal point in the life of a character. It would be difficult to accept a reluctant protagonist being persuaded to overthrow the villainous tyrant because of a good bowel movement, but easy to understand that a fulfilling sexual and/or emotional relationship might be inspiration enough.

An important point here is that sex or violence is going to be widely acceptable in our society only if the act moves the plot in some necessary direction. There are other uses for such scenes, such as: providing a moral or social background for a different society, acting as a frame for dialogue, defining some central aspect of a character, or simply for emotional and/or erotic impact. If the scene is a pivotal event in the character's story, then a graphic depiction may be more of a requirement than an option, and as such it may be more acceptable to the majority of readers. It may be true that once authors found no need for such a device in telling a story (though I would suggest reading a bit of Chaucer for perspective), but there were stories that went untold for lack of it as well.

Sincerely,

M. Greek
Chicago, IL

Thank you. This is a point that seems obvious (once it is explained) and it is one I didn't think of for myself. I am always grateful for enlightenment, even if sometimes chagrined at having to have something spelled out that I ought to have understood without having it spelled out.

Isaac Asimov

Dr. Isaac Asimov,

We, who take your magazine in Braille, appreciate it on behalf of ourselves and our sighted colleagues, who sometimes appreciate being read aloud to. How long has your magazine been available in Braille?

I particularly appreciate your modest perspective and gentle humor. Many of your science fact and fiction books are now available in Braille and on disk and cassette. They teach and entertain us all. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Anne Hill
Tonasket, WA

We are only too glad to do what we can in cases of this sort.

—Isaac Asimov

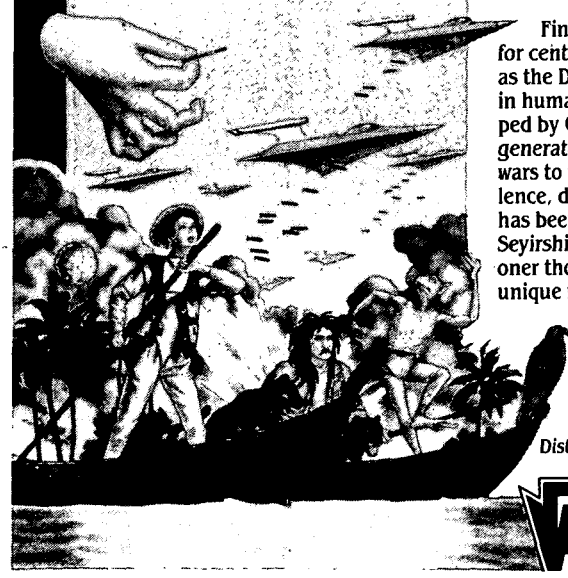
Dear Friends,

I truly enjoyed Robert Silver-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the renowned *Diadem* series comes a brave new heroine

JO CLAYTON
SHADOWPLAY



Finally freed after being captive for centuries in the alien artifact known as the Diadem, Shadith is once again in human form—only to be spacenapped by Ginbiryol Seyirshi, a being who generates devastating interplanetary wars to film and sell the resulting violence, destruction, and death. Shadith has been chosen for a key role in Seyirshi's newest "production." But prisoner though she is, Shadith has some unique resources of her own, and with her Diadem-mastered powers, she plans to rewrite the script—and put an end to Seyirshi's interstellar reign of terror!

Distributed by NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

$4.50

DAW

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

berg's "Enter A Soldier" (*IAsfm*, June 89).

I liked the story for what it is *not*, as much as for what it is. It isn't a pedantic treatise on imperialistic motivations, AI and why, or Philosophyness. None of these subjects occupies my every waking thought, but woven together in "Enter A Soldier," the final fabric is delightful, like Mr. Silverberg's sense of humor.

Historical figures have been thrown together many times, and many ways, but rarely with such depth of character, nor with such enjoyable results for the contemporary characters involved. The shift in the levels of enthusiasm in Tanner and Richardson as their experiment gave more and more evidence of success was human and believable.

If Mr. Silverberg ever expands this well-crafted short story into a novel, look for me first in the line at the bookseller's. I'd even buy it in hardcover!

Robert Whitehill
Montclair, NJ

Bob Silverberg is one of science fiction's best craftsmen, so it is not really surprising that you like the story so well. However, I'm sure he'll be delighted with your appreciation.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear *IAsfm*:

The cover picture on your August 1989 issue is the best I have seen. I have looked through the magazine and can find no credit to the artist or to whether or not reproductions of the artwork are available. I am interested in obtaining a copy of the cover to said magazine, and would appreciate any help you are able to give me in this endeavor.

Bruce N. Reindal
Casper, NY

The credit for the cover is given on the table of contents page, admittedly in small print. The August 1989 cover was by Michael Whelan. It was a picture from Mr. Whelan's portfolio that we liked a great deal and it doesn't correspond with any particular story in the issue. For obtaining a copy I imagine you'd have to dicker with Mr. Whelan.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

This letter is a year late, but I feel it is still relevant. I'm sure you have already received many protests from readers whose knowledge of equines comes from practical experience, not superficial and misleading impressions.

Your anti-horse editorial in the September, 1988 *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* troubled me quite a bit. I am not blaming you, really, for your viewpoint, because I know you are a city person. It's common for city people to fear animals. Fear of the unknown is a common human reaction. What disturbs me is that, because of your professional involvement in science writing, many people will incorrectly assume you are familiar with the subject of that editorial.

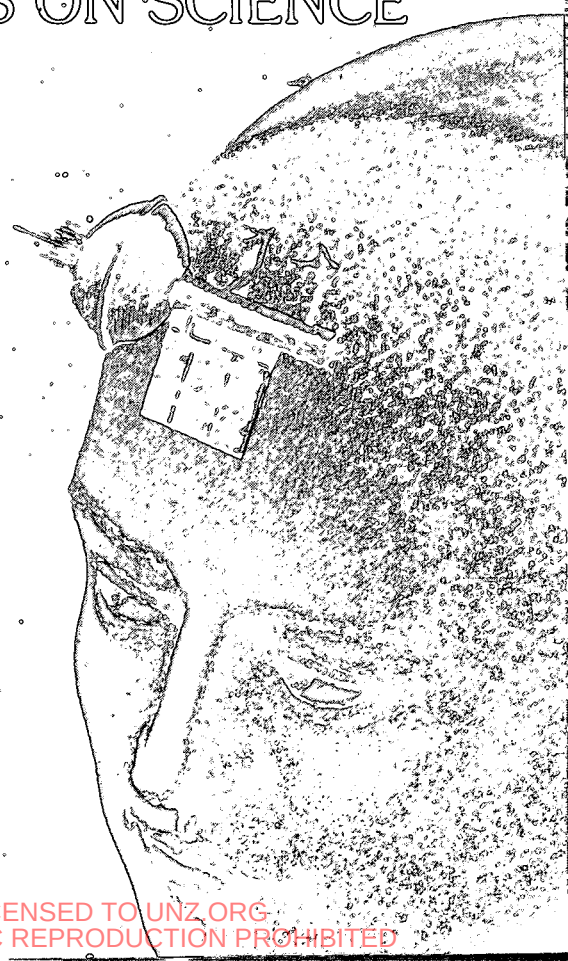
Yes, accidents do happen with horses; but, like accidents with cars, most are preventable through education and common sense. If

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the preeminent science-fiction monthly on planet Earth—an important collection of its best science-fact offerings of the past decade...

analog

ESSAYS ON SCIENCE



"An exciting roadmap into the 21st century and a 'must read' for anyone who wants to live into the 21st century."—Ben Bova

Edited by
Stanley Schmidt
Editor, ANALOG Magazine

Includes John Gribbin • Poul Anderson • Tony Rothman • L. Sprague de Camp • David Brin • Arthur C. Clarke • K. Eric Drexler • Gordon R. Woodcock •

At all bookstores. $19.95

WILEY
Publishers Since 1807

Professional and Trade Division
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158-0012

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

horses were as dangerous and filthy as you suggest, they could hardly be used to he'p the handicapped. Yet, more and more often, horses, donkeys, mules, and many other animals are being used with the handicapped, the retarded, the mentally ill, and even in the rehabilitation of criminals. Often, these people will respond to animals when they will respond to *nothing* else.

You may be surprised to know that many American farmers have reduced their dependence on machinery, and returned to draft animals—not big agri-biz, of course, but people who farm for a living. They are *not* going broke, either. They are making a good living, and what's more, they like it. The advantages of draft animals are many. They don't depend on foreign oil, or on armies of factory workers to support them. (The "efficiency" of the modern farmer is a myth. He *doesn't* produce all that food by himself. Countless city people supply him with the means of producing it.) Draft animals' "exhaust" fertilizes the soil that feeds them: a self-renewing cycle. They are *themselves* self-renewing: can a tractor give birth to another tractor? Unlike tractors, equines working a field don't harmfully compact the soil. There are other advantages, but I won't list them all. The information is available to any who can read: check your public library.

You mentioned the problem of horse manure. Gosh, manure is portable, and easily removed! Can you scoop up smog with a shovel? Invent a way to do *that*, Dr. A., and you'll be the world's richest man.

And please: any time you feel tempted to abuse something in public, *research it first.* You may learn it does not need abusing at all. A wrong point of view is *never* useful.

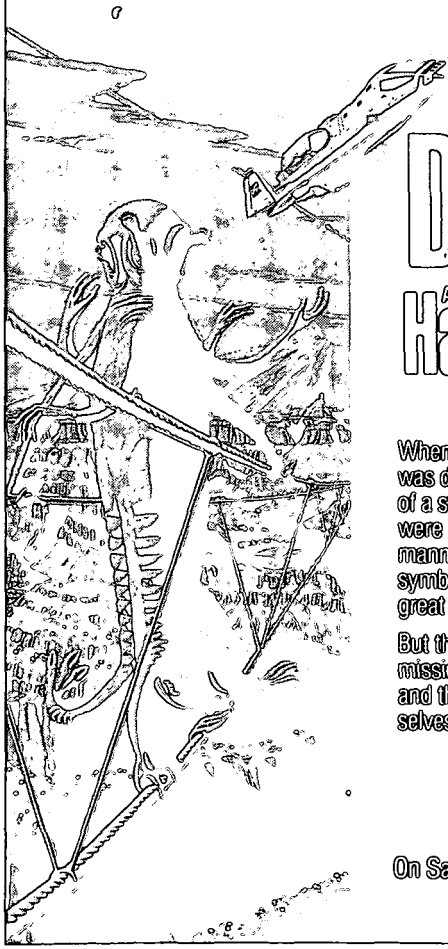
Eunice Raymond
Sun City, CA

Now, now. It was not an anti-horse editorial. Don't jump so. I love horses (from a distance). I think they are the most beautiful animals that exist and the sight of a race-horse gobbling up the ground stirs me. All I said was that horses have an odor, and they do. *You may be so used to it you don't notice it, but I* do. *And I only mentioned it because someone said the air would smell so sweet if there were no automobiles. And I said: Not if there were horses. Listen, a fact is a fact.*
—Isaac Asimov

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The spectacular new sf adventure from the author of *Noninterference* and *Kaleidoscope*!



A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

A NOVEL BY

Harry Turtledove

When the Viking lander on the planet Minerva was destroyed, sending back one last photo of a strange alien being, scientists on Earth were flabbergasted. And so a joint US/USSR manned space mission was mounted—a symbol of the new peace between the two great rivals.

But that peace was threatened when the mission landed in the middle of an alien war, and the Americans and Soviets found themselves on opposite sides!

On Sale in May

DEL REY sf in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEAT STUFF

by Matthew J. Costello

I made three promises when I started writing full-time.

First, I vowed to get out of bed in the early A.M. with the rest of my family struggling to face the day. I realized how annoying it could be to see this big lump curled up in toasty sheets on a chilly January morning. So, though I could leisurely pad down to my office at a civilized 9:30 or so, I'm up and running by 6:45.

Then, I committed myself to exercise every day. If I was going to spend most of the day sitting in a chair, watching a tube (with electro-magnetic radiation!), well then I would put in twenty minutes of vigorous exercise—running or biking—every day.

And lastly, I planned on getting a modem.

The modem would link me with the outside world, for messages, for fun, for nifty bulletin boards, and for round-table discussions carried over the phone lines and displayed right on my terminal.

It would, I hope, help keep me human.

The first two parts of my tri-pronged plan fell into place rather easily. But I avoided the last, the modem, the electronic village experience. In my undergraduate years I had mistakenly been urged into an engineering school when my personality was suited for almost anything but. I gritted my teeth and completed the degree, with only one obvious hang-up . . . an aversion to technology.

Fortunately, I discovered an easy entry into the world of modems through the interactive service, Prodigy (445 Hamilton Avenue, NY 10601). Prodigy is a consumer-oriented on-line service put together by Sears and IBM. Unlike other information services, Prodigy is designed for people who have bought a PC and—to a large extent—don't have a clue as to what to do with it. The Prodigy starter package comes with a wonderfully clear manual, installation disks, and—if you need one—a Hayes modem.

Prodigy has over 700 features—news stories and headlines, weather maps, and information from around the country. You can check sports scores or log your kids onto a club with games, stories, puzzles, and contests. Consumer Reports is on-line, with the entire library of product reports available for your study. There are stock quotes, an on-line broker, and travel services through American Airlines EAASY SAABRE.

Prodigy has also hired a host of on-line experts who write columns

(Continued on page 67)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FULL COLOR GRAPHIC NOVELS

THE NEW DIMENSION

BELL'S THEOREM
Trilogy of Schultheiss
$10.95 ea.
37 62 74
Medical experiment turns nightmare in parallel world.

ABOMINATIONS
by Hermann
$9.95
Short horror stories. 80

FIRES
by Mattotti $12.95
Mystical possession ends in expressionist inferno. 48

MAGICIAN'S WIFE
by Charyn/Boucq $14.95
45 Werewolf wife is victim of magic.

FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
and other Poe tales by Corben
$10.95
13

GODS IN CHAOS and **WOMAN TRAP**
by Bilal $12.95 ea. 49 50
Paris, 2020, Egyptian dieties struggle for power.

MAGIC CRYSTAL
by Moebius/Bati
$6.95
S&S quest for young adults. 67

VULCAN'S FORGE and **THREE SUNS OF VINA** by Leloup
$6.95 ea. 65 76
Teenage heroine in detailed technological sci-fi adventure.

TIME TRAP
by Jacobs $8.95
For all ages.
Will he get out alive? 66

MAIL ORDER TO: ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
Dept. 590, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

You do not need to use this coupon if you need more space

Please send me the graphic novels circled below:

13 37 45 48 49 50 62
65 66 67-74 76 80

Please add $2 postage/handling per book; NY orders add 8.25% sales tax. Please send check/m.o. only. Do not send cash. Allow 6-8 weeks.

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

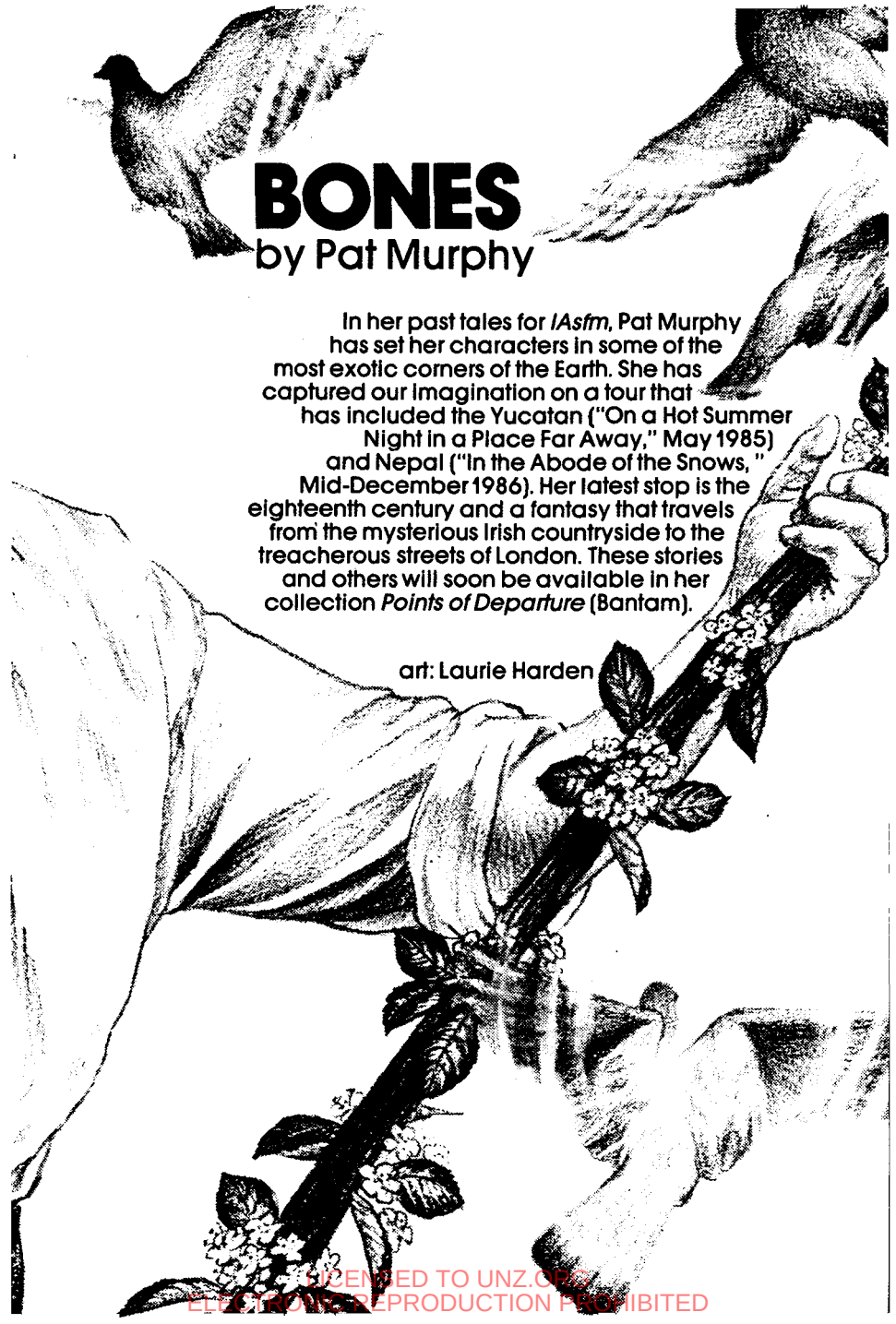
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BONES

by Pat Murphy

In her past tales for *IAsfm*, Pat Murphy has set her characters in some of the most exotic corners of the Earth. She has captured our imagination on a tour that has included the Yucatan ("On a Hot Summer Night in a Place Far Away," May 1985) and Nepal ("In the Abode of the Snows," Mid-December 1986). Her latest stop is the eighteenth century and a fantasy that travels from the mysterious Irish countryside to the treacherous streets of London. These stories and others will soon be available in her collection *Points of Departure* (Bantam).

art: Laurie Harden



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is a true story, more or less. In the history books, you can find Dr. John Hunter, a noted surgeon and naturalist. London's Royal College of Surgeons maintains his museum, an amazing collection of eighteenth-century oddities and natural curiosities.

Charlie Bryne is in the history books, too. He came to London from Ireland in 1782. Advertised as the World's Tallest Man and the Descendant of Irish Kings, he exhibited himself as a curiosity and a freak.

The history books tell of their meeting—but now I'm getting ahead of myself. I must start long before that.

On a cold winter evening, when the ground was white with frost, Charlie Bryne sat on a stool by the peat fire. Though the boy was only ten years old, he was already as tall as a grown man. His mother, a youthful widow, sat close by, her shawl pulled up around her shoulders and a glass of whiskey in her hand. The firelight shone on her face, making her cheeks rosy and her eyes bright.

"Tell me the story, Mum," Charlie asked. "Tell me how I got to be so big."

She smiled at him fondly. "Ah, you know the tale as well as I do, Charlie. You have no need for me to tell it."

"I've forgotten. Tell me again," he pleaded.

"All right—just once more. Fill my glass and we'll have the story." He refilled her glass from the jug and she settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"It was a year after a young horse threw my husband and broke his back," she began. "I was a widow with a fine farm, and many a bachelor farmer would gladly have had me to wife. But I was happy to be on my lone, and I would have none of them." She pushed back her dark hair with her hand, smiling at the memory. "Old Sean Dermot died that autumn, and I went to the wake. As it came about, I stayed too late, and I was walking home after dark. 'Twas a lonesome road I had to travel—I was tired, so I took a short cut, the path that ran beside the Giant's Boneyard."

She shook her head at her own foolishness. The Giant's Boneyard was a lonely, haunted spot. In a field too rocky for planting, wild grasses grew thick and green around great boulders of unusual shapes. People said that the boulders were the bones of a giant, a king of Ireland who had died a hundred years before, while fighting to protect his people from invaders. Some said that he had promised, with his dying words, to return if ever Ireland needed him. Some said he walked at night, strolling through the field that held his bones. In any case, most people avoided the place after dark.

"The moon was a sliver in the sky, hanging low and giving just enough light for me to see. I was only halfway across the field when I saw a blue light, a beautiful light, the color of the Blessed Virgin's robes. I was not foolish enough to go running after fairy lanterns. I kept to the path,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hurrying home, but the light danced across the field toward me. And then I saw it clearly."

She clasped her hands before her, and leaned toward Charlie. He caught his breath, watching her. "The blue light shone from a golden crown on the head of an enormous man. A powerful man—stronger than the blacksmith in the village, taller than the tallest I had ever seen. He was handsome, but his eyes were dark and fierce. When he looked at me, I froze, bound to the spot and unable to run."

She fixed her gaze on Charlie, as if to show him how it felt, and he shivered. "He spoke to me sweetly, saying that I would bear him a son. His son would have the old blood in his veins, and he would save Ireland. Then he took me by the hand and let me to a spot where the grass was soft. There he lay with me, taking his pleasure as a man does with a woman. In the morning, I woke with the sun in my eyes, beside the boulder they call the Giant's Skull." She leaned back in her chair. "Nine months later, you were born. You were the biggest baby the midwife had ever laid her eyes upon. And you've kept growing ever since. You take after your father, sure enough."

Charlie nodded, gazing into the fire. "Have you ever seen my father again?"

"That I have not," she murmured. "But I know you for his son."

"Then I must save Ireland? When must I do this?"

"That I don't know. When the time comes, surely it will be clear to you."

Charlie frowned at the fire, his expression fierce. "I will do what I must do," he said. "If only I can figure out what that is."

Charlie wasn't his mother's son, though he sat at her knee and fetched her whiskey. He was a child of the woods and the wild fields—growing up outdoors as much as in. Summer and winter alike, he ran barefoot, coming home to his mother's house with dusty feet and brambles in his hair.

He was a strange lad—with a peculiar, dreamy air about him that made some think he was dim-witted. But he wasn't stupid—he just paid attention to other lessons. Reading and writing seemed unimportant when he could look out the window and see the flowers growing in the fields, hear the birds singing. He understood the mathematics of bird nests, the poetry of cloud formations, the penmanship of snail tracks left on the cold stones of the churchyard wall.

He had a way about him. Animals liked him: the wildest horse would consent to be shod when Charlie held its head. Cows bore their calves more easily if he were standing by. Over the years, the widow Bryne's farm prospered: her fields were fertile and her hens laid more eggs than any in the village. Her cows gave the richest milk and bore their calves with never a bit of trouble.

Charlie lived with his mother, helping to tend her prospering farm. When he was just sixteen, he was taller than the tallest man in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

county. At twenty, he measured eight-foot-tall, and he was still growing. And always he wondered when he would be called upon to save Ireland.

One sunny day, he was drowsing in the Giant's Boneyard, his back against the boulder known as the Giant's Skull. Leaning against the sunwarmed surface, he listened to the wind in the grass and the high thin peeping of the little birds that searched for seeds in the meadow. A lark flew from the grass and came to perch on the boulder. When Charlie held out his hand, the bird flew to him. With one finger, he gently rubbed the bird's head. When Charlie stopped his petting, the lark tilted back its head, sang a liquid trill, then pushed off his finger and took flight.

Charlie watched the bird fly, then plucked a blade of grass from a clump beside him and chewed on the sweet stem. The earth beneath him was warm; the sun shone on his face. He belonged in this meadow the way the boulders belonged. It seemed to him sometimes that he should stay here always, letting the grass grow over him, its roots tickling the surface of his skin as it tickled the granite boulders.

The wind carried the sound of voices. Some neighboring farmers had stopped their work in a nearby field to have a bit of lunch. Their deep voices blended with the distant songbirds and the humming of bees in the wildflowers. Charlie let the sounds wash over him.

"Patrick's gone to England," said one man. Charlie recognized the voice of Mick, an elderly farmer. Patrick was his oldest son. "He said he'll come home rich or not at all."

"Not at all, more than likely," muttered his companion. John, Charlie guessed from the voice—another neighbor. "Have you ever known a young lad to come home? My wife has borne me five strong sons. The Lord took two of them, and they are happy with the angels in heaven. But the other three are in England. I think the ones that are with the angels are more likely to come home than the ones that are in London."

"Aye, that's God's truth," Mick agreed sadly. "I've never known a one to come home to till his father's farm."

A pause, punctuated by the gurgling of beer pouring from the jug.

"Every night, as I go to sleep, I wonder who will till this land when I'm gone," John said softly. " 'Tis not such a large plot—barely enough to feed us—but it was my father's farm and his father's before him. John stopped talking long enough to take a draught of beer, then continued. " 'Tis a sad thing when a man who has raised five sons has no one to help him with the plowing."

"It ain't right," Mick said. "It ain't right that the best of our children run away to England, never to return."

John laughed, a dry humorless sound. "Aye, we need to protect ourselves. The blasted English have given up fighting with swords. Instead they lure the children away with sweet promises and gold. Treacherous bastards."

"Aye," Mick agreed sadly. "That they are."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WEAR THE FUTURE

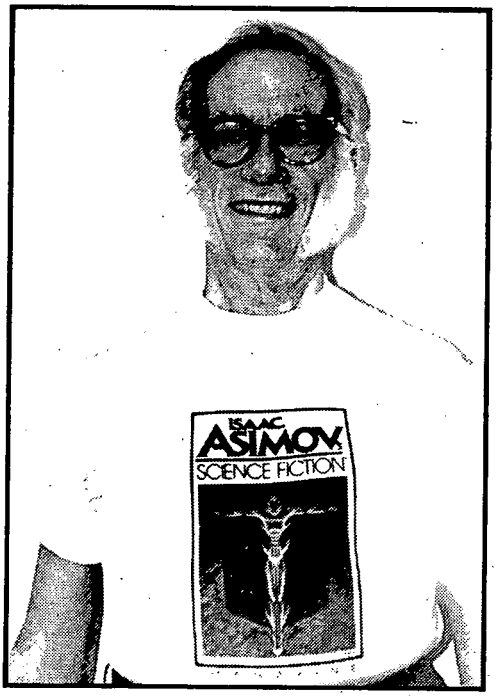
Isaac Asimov's T-Shirts are light years beyond the ordinary!

THE IAsfm T-Shirt features the color artwork of illustrator Joe Burleson. The extraterrestrial image is printed on heavyweight, high-quality fabric. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

ONLY $7.95

Plus $2.00 postage and handling.
Please specify size and quantity.
Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery.

IAsfm T-shirt
Davis Publications, Inc.
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017



Please send me _____ IAsfm t-shirts
Please specify size __ S __ M __ L __ XL

Name _____
[PLEASE PRINT]

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please enclose personal check or money order. No COD's please. New York residents please add sales tax.

Send to: IAsfm T-shirt
Davis Publications, Inc.
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The men were silent for a moment, and then John spoke again. "I see you looking over there at those boulders. Old stories won't help you now."

Mick's voice was soft. "I think sometimes about the old king, rising up from his bones. If he were to come before us, I'd tell him to bring the children home. Go to London and bring our sons and daughters back to us."

John snorted. "If you're looking for magic to save you, you're more foolish than I thought. There's no magic there—just boulders and tall green grass. The magic faded long ago."

Charlie frowned. John was an unhappy man—bitter, tired, dried up as the land he cultivated. Charlie understood why all his sons left and why all his daughters married young.

"Ah, well," Mick said. "All the wishing in the world won't till the field. I think we'd best get back to work."

The voices faded, leaving only the humming of the bees and the wind in the grasses. Charlie tilted his head to the sun and thought.

Thinking made Charlie uneasy. But he could not help considering Mick's words. For some time, he had felt that something was wrong, an uneasy and uncomfortable sensation in his belly. He had watched his neighbors' sons and daughters leave their fathers' rocky farms and go to England, saying they would return. The land called out to them, wishing them back again, but they did not come back. And he dreamed of a day when the children were all gone; old men and women tilled farms, weeping for their sons and daughters who had run away, never to return.

Maybe he fell asleep in the sun. Without being aware of it, he may have quietly slipped over the thin line between sleep and wakefulness, lying there in the grass. The sun was low in the sky and the boulders cast long shadows across the meadow.

He heard footsteps and looked up. A tall man wearing a crown regarded him sadly. Charlie scrambled to his feet. He recognized his father, though the man did not entirely match his mother's description. The King's eyes were not fierce, but mournful and sad. He wasn't really handsome: his face was broad and pleasant, rather like Charlie's own. His gray beard was touched with green, as if strands of moss grew among the hairs. He wore armor made of tarnished metal plate, joined by strips of leather, and small, soft-petaled flowers sprouted among the lacings. His crown gave off a weak blue light, like the strange fluorescence that glows from rotting wood.

The king sat down heavily on a nearby boulder. "Your turn has come, my son," he said. His tone was melancholy; his voice, a soft rumble. "You must go to England and bring the sons and daughters of Ireland home."

Charlie nodded eagerly. "I know," he said eagerly. "I'll bring them home."

The king stared at the ground. "There is still magic here, though some do not have eyes to see it." He studied Charlie. "You must come back to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this place, when your task is done. You belong here. You are part of the magic and power. This is the place where you must die and be buried."

Charlie frowned. He saw no need to talk about what would happen when he died. He was young and strong and eager to do what his father wanted. "Yes, yes," he said. "I understand."

The king reached for the scabbard that hung at his side and pulled out a sword. It was as tarnished as the armor, but jewels gleamed on its hilt. "Here is my sword. Perhaps it will help you." He looked at the weapon doubtfully. "It was my father's before me, and it still has some magic in it."

Charlie took hold of the hilt and bowed to his father clumsily.

It was dark when Charlie woke. The grass was damp with dew, and where the sword had been was a plain straight staff of hawthorn wood. When Charlie picked it up, white blossoms and green shoots sprouted from the dry wood, as if spring had come in the space of a minute. Charlie frowned and brushed the blossoms away but they sprouted again. At last, he gave up and left them be, carrying a staff adorned with small white flowers that smelled of spring.

Every August, not far from Dublin, farmers gathered at the Donnybrook Fair to race horses, sell cattle, drink whiskey, and get into fights. That year, on the last day of the fair, the sky was gray and a misty rain was falling. The hardpacked soil of the fairground was slick and muddy.

Joe Vance hunched his shoulders against the dampness and pushed through the crowd, making his way down the aisle of hastily constructed booths and sagging tents. The countrypeople seemed oblivious to the rain: they were playing pitch-and-toss, gawking at the Punch and Judy show, listening to the hideous wail of the organ grinder's instrument and laughing at the antics of his flea-bitten monkey.

Vance had spent the morning trying to entice passing farmers into a simple sporting game. He had three shells and a dried pea: to win, a farmer had only to guess which shell hid the pea. But the crowd had been reluctant to play. For five hours, Vance had been sitting in the drizzle and calling to the crowd without a penny to show for it. Vance suspected that some other thimble rigger must have passed through recently, and the locals were wise to the trick. All in all, Vance was sick of the country and eager to return to London, where a sharp had a chance to earn a guinea or two.

Vance was almost to the end of the aisle when he saw a clump of people gathered around a young man. The young man seemed to be standing on a box; he towered over the tallest man in the crowd. On his shoulder, a meadowlark perched, looking just as calm as you please. As Vance watched, the small bird tipped back his head and sang a high sweet trill, followed by a glorious burst of song. The liquid notes cut through the babble of the crowd and the wailing of the organ.

"Is the bloody bird tame?" Vance asked a man in the crowd, but the man shrugged. Vance pushed his way closer. He had seen caged finches

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fetch a pretty penny among the London gentry, and they did nothing but chirp and flutter. A man might turn a profit if he had a supply of tame larks.

Just as Vance reached the front of the crowd, the bird finished its song and took flight. The young man on whose shoulder it had perched smiled after it and took a step, as if to follow. With a shock, Vance realized that the man was not standing on a box at all. With his bare feet planted firmly on the muddy earth, he stood at least two feet taller than any other man in the crowd. He was a country lad, dressed in rough homespun cloth that was marked with the dust of the road. In one hand, he held a wooden staff that was decorated with white flowers.

Vance forgot the lark and the hope of profits that had flown with the bird. "God save me, man—how bloody tall are you?" Vance asked, staring up.

The young man glanced down at Vance and shrugged. "Tallest in County Derry."

"Tallest I've ever laid eyes on," Vance said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty years this summer."

"Bloody remarkable," Vance muttered. He squinted, measuring the man with his eyes. Londoners were always willing to pay to see a curiosity. "Must be eight feet tall, if you're an inch. What's your name, lad?"

"Charlie Bryne."

"My name's Joe Vance, Charlie, and I'm pleased to meet you. You're a likely lad, Charlie, a very likely lad. I must confess, I've never met a one like you before. A marvel in your own right."

Charlie's eyes were a brilliant innocent blue, as pale and clear as the summer sky. "Where are you from?" he asked.

"From London, the finest city in all the world."

Charlie studied Vance. "Tell me—are there many Irishmen in London?"

"Irishmen? Why I'd wager half a crown that there are more Irishmen in St. Giles Rookery than in all of County Derry," Vance said enthusiastically. "You'd never be homesick in London."

Charlie's face was guileless, the sweet face of a fool. "I want to go to London," he said.

Vance smiled at the way that fate was playing into his hands. His luck, it seemed, had finally turned. "I knew it when I laid eyes on you, Charlie. I knew you for a man with a spirit of adventure, an itching to see the world. And you're in luck, Charlie, tremendous luck." Vance moved closer, reaching up to place a hand on Charlie's shoulder. "I'll take you there, lad. You see, I'm a manager. I find people with special talents, and I help 'em along. Groom 'em, so to speak. Back in London, I managed Bruisin' Peg. You may have heard of her?"

Charlie shook his head.

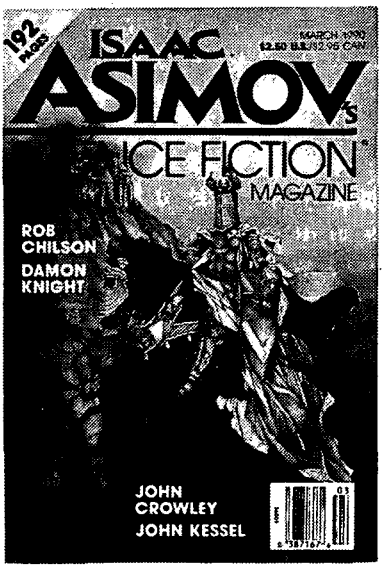
"Best lady prize fighter in all London. When Peg was in the ring, you could hear the screaming for miles around. Pity she had to retire." Vance felt it unnecessary to mention that her decision to retire had been pre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 34% OFF THE COVER PRICE

1-800-333-4108



YES SEND ME

☐ 12 Issues for only $19.97
☐ 18 Issues for only $29.50

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION®
P.O. Box 7058
Red Oak, IA 51591

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions *12* issues for *$22.97*, 18 issues for *$33.97*. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency. HESC-3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cipitated by a broken leg and a clout on the ear that had left her half deaf. He had abandoned her in a low London boarding house, with enough money to pay a week's rent. It had seemed like an opportune time to leave town with the rest of the profits. "I'll take you to London, lad," Vance continued. "It'll be a wonderful opportunity for you, a wonderful opportunity."

And so it happened that Charlie came to be on board a bluff-bowed brig that sailed from Dublin to England. Late at night, on the first night of the crossing, Tom Dorland was on deck, having been awakened by the lice that infested his bedding and clothes. He strolled in the open air, grateful that the cold and the motion had quieted the insects, but knowing that they would rouse again if he returned to his narrow bunk.

A half-moon, high in the sky, illuminated the deck, casting a silver light on the boxes and barrels and bundles that were lashed to the railings. The wind had died and the ship was barely moving through the water. Tom leaned on the railing, staring out to sea.

"'Tis a pleasant evening," a deep voice said from the shadows beside a large box.

Tom glanced toward the voice, frowning into the shadows. "'Seems a chilly night to be sleeping out in the air," he said.

"Too many people in the cabin," the man said.

Tom nodded. The passenger's cabin was a dank shelter on the foredeck. When the ship was fully booked, as it was for this passage, the small space became impossibly crowded.

"How long will it take to reach London?" the man asked.

Tom looked up at the stars. "We could be on the sea for days unless we get a wind."

"Ah," the man in the shadows said. "Is that so?" Tom heard the creaking of the deck and saw a large shadow detach itself from the others. A very large shadow—the man was taller than Tom by more than two feet. Tom stared up at the giant—another crewman had told him of the tall man who had come aboard as a passenger, but Tom had assumed that the other sailor's talk was exaggerated.

"You're a big 'un," Tom managed at last.

"I'm my father's son," the giant said, leaning on the railing beside Tom. The big man shook his head, staring out at the calm waters. "I have urgent business in London."

Tom shrugged. "If you want to get there quickly, you have my blessing," he said disrespectfully. "Call up a wind and blow us there in a hurry."

The giant did not take offense at Tom's tone. "A wind," he mused. "A wind to blow us away from Ireland." He moved his hand and Tom noticed, for the first time, the staff he carried. The giant frowned at it, then waved it tentatively out over the rail, swinging it in a circle. A breath of fresh wind puffed against Tom's face. The giant waved the staff again, smiling now. The wind filled the sails and gently pushed the ship toward the shore of England.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

London was larger than Charlie had expected. So many people, bustling here and there with their own business to attend to. He would have been lost in a minute without Joe Vance. He followed the little man down narrow winding streets, ducking to avoid the wooden signs that hung over shop doorways. Vance threaded his way through the commotion with ease, dodging coaches and hackneys, pushing past fruit sellers with baskets and barrows, side-stepping odorous puddles of offal and horse dung. Charlie was hard-pressed to keep up. He saw an Irishwoman selling oranges on the street corner, her black shawl wrapped tight about her shoulders to keep off the cold. He wanted to stop and chat with her, but Vance rushed on and Charlie feared he would lose his guide. He noticed a young Irish girl selling flowers. But he could not stop to talk, he had to hurry to follow Vance. People stared at him as he passed, called to their friends and pointed at him.

Vance turned from a narrow street into an even narrower alley. The thin strip of evening sky that showed between the tenements was gray with fog; the air was damp and cool. Laundry, strung between the buildings, hung limp in the still air. A group of boys was playing marbles at the far end of the street. Two pigs slept in a scatter of straw in the gutter. As Charlie passed, the larger animal lifted its head and sniffed the air, its small eyes regarding the giant with a dim sort of recognition.

The alley led to a small courtyard where tall buildings blocked out all but the smallest square of gray sky. Vance stepped into a hallway that reeked of varnish from the caneshop next door and called up the stairs. The woman who came down shrieked when she saw him—a cry of surprise and delight, mixed with a little bit of chiding. "Well, it's Joe Vance, blast your eyes. Where have you been, you no-good scoundrel."

While Vance and the woman talked, Charlie waited in the courtyard, staring up at the patch of sky. He heard them murmuring about someone named Peg, and Vance said "God rest her soul," in an insincere voice. But Charlie paid no attention.

He felt tired and confused. On the ship, he had begun to feel ill at ease, missing the solid warmth of Irish soil beneath his feet. When he had complained to Vance, the little man had attributed the complaint to seasickness and said that the feeling would go away when he reached solid ground again. But the sickness remained, a hollowness in his belly, like the emptiness of hunger without the hunger pains. He wore shoes now—Vance had insisted on that when they reached Dublin—and he longed for the touch of honest soil beneath his feet.

"Charlie, come along, lad. Mary will set us up with the rooms we need," Vance called to him.

Vance seemed familiar with the house. The woman showed them a furnished sitting room and a bedroom that attached to it. The bedroom was dark and cold, but Charlie just shrugged when Vance asked him what he thought. He barely looked at the rooms, knowing that he would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not be in London for so very long. He would gather the Irish, and then be on his way. So it was not worth quibbling about the look of the rooms.

Vance engaged the rooms and then hurried Charlie along, saying that they had many things to do that day. They went to a tailor shop and Vance had Charlie measured for a suit of clothes. Then they went to the office of the *Morning Herald* where Vance placed an advertisement and ordered handbills to post. "Make 'em say—'The tallest man in the world,' " Vance told the clerk. " 'Eighth wonder of the world.' "

While Vance was talking to the clerk, Charlie stepped outside. He looked down the narrow street. In the distance, he saw the open sky and a spot of green. He left Vance behind, drawn to the greenery.

The River Thames flowed through London, bringing water to the city and carrying away the sewage and refuse. Charlie walked down the street and found himself on steps leading down to the river. A tall tree grew on the river bank, providing a restful spot in the gray stone of the city. In the tree, a bird was singing.

Charlie sat on the stone steps. A seagull landed beside him and cocked its head from side to side, studying him with one yellow eye and then the other. Charlie smiled at the bird, then tilted his head back so that the sun shone on his face. The river water lapped gently against the bottom step, whispering comforting words in a language all its own. He rested there, soaking up the warmth of the sun and feeling a portion of his strength returning to him.

Sean was a mudlark, one of the filthy crew who made their living by scavenging bits of saleable refuse from the mud of the River Thames. When the tide was out, he and his two brothers waded into the dirty water, foraging for bits of rope and old iron to sell to the rag man, or for lumps of coal that their mother could burn.

Sean was seven years old, and he had been mudlarking since he was six. His father, a laborer on the docks, had died after being crushed between two barges. With Sean's father's death, the family had fallen on hard times. His mother did char work when she could get it, and all the children scavenged.

On warm days, it was not so bad to wade in the river: they could clamber from the water and let the sun warm them every now and again. But when the wind blew, there was no comfort for them—just cold mud and cold water and a gray and cheerless sky.

On that sunny day, Sean and his brothers had been both lucky and unlucky. Over by the docks where some men were repairing a ship, they found a dozen copper nails, worth a half-penny for the lot. That was good luck—but bad luck came with it. Sean had stepped on one of the nails, running it deep into his foot. When the sailors chased them away from the docks, he could scarcely run for the pain. Even now, hours later, his foot throbbed with a hot pain and he hobbled after his brothers, walking on his heel to avoid touching the wound to the mud.

"Look there," David, his oldest brother, called. "By the river steps."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Over 2,000 pages of astounding stories and articles. The entire set is on sale for only $29.97. Or you can buy individual books to fill in your collection.

Please send me the *Analog Anthology Set* (8 books) for only $29.97. I have enclosed my check for that amount.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

MEGC-2

Mail to: ***Analog***
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, N.J. 07462

Please send me the individual Analog anthologies indicated. Enclosed is my check or money order for $ _____

CLASSIC ANTHOLOGIES

- ☐ **#1 FIFTY YEARS OF THE BEST ($5.50)**
- ☐ **#2 READERS' CHOICE ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#3 CHILDREN OF THE FUTURE ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#4 LIGHTER SIDE ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#6 WAR AND PEACE ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#7 ALIENS ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#8 WRITERS' CHOICE-VOL. II ($4.50)**
- ☐ **#9 FROM MIND TO MIND ($4.50)**

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery

For orders outside the United States please add $6.00 for foreign postage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tallest man Sean had ever seen was lounging in the sun on the stone steps that led down to the water. "Come on," David said. "Let's go talk to him."

The three boys approached cautiously, marveling at the size of the man. Their mother had told them stories of the giants who lived in Ireland in the early days. This man might have emerged from such a story.

Sean was in shallow water just a few yards away from the giant when the man opened his eyes. "Good day, sir," said David, the boldest of the three. "Have you a penny for some poor lads?"

The giant blinked at them. "A penny?" He shook his head. "Not so much as a penny, though Joe Vance says that I will be a wealthy man soon enough."

Encouraged by such an amiable response, Sean stepped closer. "You're very big," he said. "Are you a giant, like the ones in the stories?"

The man nodded. "My father was a giant. I suppose I'm one, too." He held out his hand. "Come up out of the water if you like." He took Sean's hand and lifted him from the water. "There now," he murmured. "Sit down here."

Sean limped up the steps to sit beside the giant. His brothers hung back, gaping at him from the safety of the river. But the giant seemed friendly enough.

"What have you done to your foot?" the giant asked him.

"Stuck it with a nail," Sean said, bending his leg and twisting his foot around so he could examine the wound in the sole. The skin around the puncture had turned a deep purple. The chill of the river water had numbed the foot somewhat, but when Sean tried to wipe the mud away from the wound, he winced at the stabbing pain.

The giant's hand closed over Sean's, engulfing the boy's hand and foot both. "Don't poke at it, lad. Let it be, and perhaps I can help." The giant's hand was warm and it seemed to soothe the pain.

The boy gaped up at the giant. "Are you a doctor?"

The giant shook his head. "Not a doctor. But it seems I sometimes have a healing way about me." He wet his lips. Suddenly, for all his size, he looked as if he were not so much older than Sean. "My father gave me a magic sword," he said softly, jerking his head toward a stout wooden staff that leaned against the steps beside him. "It has a power to it. You can touch it if you like."

Sean reached out and fingered the white blossoms that grew from the wooden shaft.

"Do you come from Ireland?" the giant asked.

Sean shook his head. "My mother came from Ireland. I have never been there."

"Ah," the giant said. "But still you are Irish by blood." He nodded slowly. "I have come to take the Irish back home. You'll be coming with me."

Young as he was, Sean knew the way of the world. He frowned at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

giant. "We can't go to Ireland," he said. "We don't have any money for the fare."

The giant studied him solemnly, as if this were the first time that he had thought of the fare. "Bran the Blessed once waded across the water between England and Ireland. He could have carried the Irish home—but he was a bigger giant than I am." He hesitated, frowning. "Maybe we could walk."

Sean shook his head. "We can't walk across the sea."

The giant looked mournful, and Sean cast about in his mind, trying to think of something that might help. "Moses parted the waters," he said. His mother made a practice of telling them stories from the Bible, on nights when she was not too tired. "Maybe you could do that."

The giant studied the Thames. He lifted his staff and waved it at the water, as if pushing it back. "Go back," he rumbled. "Show me some dry land."

The water obeyed sluggishly, drawing back away from the base of the steps to reveal the black muck of the bottom. It stopped a few feet from the steps, and the giant waved again, as if herding a reluctant cow. "Go on now. Move yourself." The water drew back another two feet, forming a smooth green-brown wall that was as smooth and shiny as glass. Sean's brothers stood ankle-deep in the mud, gazing at their own feet in amazement.

"Charlie! Where are you, you blasted Irishman? Charlie!" Hearing an angry voice, the giant lowered his staff. The waters flowed back into place and lapped quietly at the base of the steps. Sean slipped off the steps and returned to the safety of the river. A small man appeared at the top of the steps and shouted again at the sight of the giant. "Where have you been, Charlie?"

"Right here by the river," the giant said with quiet dignity. "Just talking to these lads. They're from Ireland."

Vance glared at Sean and his brothers. "Half the mudlarks in London are Irish," he grumbled. "Come on now, Charlie. We have business to attend to."

"They are my people, Joe. I'll be taking them back to Ireland presently."

Vance nodded impatiently, but softened his tone. "Certainly you will, Charlie. But now we must be going."

Sean watched the giant go. It wasn't until he followed his brothers that he realized that his foot no longer ached. That night, he sat by the fire and searched for the wound. But the sole of his foot was smooth and unblemished, with nary a puncture, a hole, or a scrape.

There are no gardens in Covent Garden. The square that bore that name was in the heart of London's West End, in the shadow of St. Paul's Church and not far from the decaying tenement houses of a slum inhabited by the Irish. By day, costermongers, people selling fruit and vegetables, filled the square. As they called out their wares, their cries competed with the braying voices of would-be entertainers: a juggler who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sent sharp knives dancing through the air, a Welshman who swallowed live mice and snakes, a man with a monkey that danced on its hind legs to the music of a hand-cranked organ, another with a chicken that walked a tightrope.

In nearby Drury Lane, gentlemen wagered on the cockfights. In the coffeehouses, gamblers favored games that depended on the spin of a wheel or the toss of the dice, playing roulette and faro, brag and basset, crimp and hazard and rolypoly. For those gamblers with money to spare at the evening's end, the south side of the square offered Mother Needham's and Mother Cole's, well-known among London's brothels.

An Irishwoman named Kathleen had a stall in Covent Garden. Her face was pretty enough—she had even features and her eyes were the color of the ocean caught in a tidepool. But most people didn't notice her eyes or her face. Instead, their gazes lingered on the hump that rose from her back like the pack on a peddler. Kathleen was born with a twist in her back, and with this she made her living.

She read palms and told fortunes. Her stall was not far from Tom King's Coffeehouse where gentlemen gambled, and many a gambler came to touch her hump for luck. Sometimes they asked her if they should gamble that night. She would study their palms and give them advice. "Not tonight, Your Grace. There's a bad look to the moon and the luck is not with you." "Stick to the wheel. The dice will be against you." Maids, out shopping for fresh fruit, would give her a penny to tell them about handsome young men. "His heart is false, dearie," she told them. "Look elsewhere for your true love."

On a sunny morning, she sat on a stool outside her stall, letting the warmth of the day soak into her bones. The weather had changed from foul to fair, and the changes made her hump ache with a deep abiding pain. She had smeared on a salve that a patterer had claimed would heal any misery, but the ache remained.

Above the cries of farmers hawking their vegetables, she heard a trill of birdsong. She looked to see if someone had caged birds to sell. The man with caged birds and the boys with nests to sell were the first and sometimes the only signs of spring in London.

When she heard the song again, she looked up and saw a songbird perched on the pole that supported her rain cover. He tilted back his head and loosed another sweet song.

"Look there," an appleseller cried. When she looked toward the voice, she saw a man who towered above the rest of the crowd. He wore the garb of a country lad and carried a walking staff decorated with hawthorn blossoms.

"That's right, look sharp, lads," said the small man who walked beside the giant. "My name's Joe Vance and this is Charlie Bryne, the Irish giant, descendant of kings. I'll wager you've never seen his like before. Tell your friends to come and see him. On display every day except Sunday."

While the small man shouted his pitch, the tall man glanced at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crowd, clearly a little bewildered by all the noise and confusion around him. If it hadn't been for his size, he would have looked like a schoolboy, visiting the big city for the first time.

When Kathleen smiled at him, he smiled genially back. "Good day to you," she called to him. "Would you have your fortune told, Charlie Bryne? No charge for the descendant of kings." Telling his fortune for free would be worth her while, she knew, attracting the crowd's attention to her and bringing her business after he was gone.

He came to her, the crowd moving aside before him like wheat before the wind. "Where in Ireland are you from?" he asked, his voice a deep grumbling that blended with the noise of the crowd.

"My parents came from County Cork," she said. "But I have been in England since I was just a babe."

He held out his hand and she took it. His skin was warm and rough, like a boulder that had been warmed by the sun. The lines on the palm were etched deep, like cracks in a granite boulder.

"Someone is looking for you," she said. "You have a secret he wants."

"I have no secrets," Charlie said.

"Someone wants something you have. There will be pain and sorrow, and you will die far from home."

He shook his head stubbornly. "That cannot be," he rumbled. "I promised my father that I would return to Ireland." He smiled down at her. "I will take you with me."

Vance called to Charlie then, shouting across the crowd. He squeezed Kathleen's hand gently. When he walked off through the crowd, the songbird followed, circling the giant. After he left, Kathleen realized that her hump no longer ached. For a time, she was free of the pain.

The clock on the mantel struck eight and Joe Vance moved into the crowd. "That's the end of today's visiting hours, ladies and gentlemen. Come again tomorrow. The amazing Irish giant will be accepting visits from the gentry from eleven to three and from five to eight each day. Tell your friends."

Charlie stood by the fire and watched the crowd leave the room, glad to see them go. For the past hour, he had answered the same questions over and over: he was twenty years old; he stood eight foot two inches in his stocking feet; his foot was fifteen inches long.

He was uncomfortable in his new suit. The tailor had cut it too tight in the chest and shoulders. Whenever Charlie took a deep breath, the seams threatened to split. Joe Vance had advised him to breathe shallowly.

Joe Vance sat in one of the chairs by the fire and spilled a handful of coins onto a kerchief that he had spread on the hearth rug. He was counting out Charlie's share: one-quarter of the take. Vance took the rest. He had explained to Charlie that out of his share he took care of all the necessities of business—paying the rent, arranging to have young boys hand out advertisements in the streets and so on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Firelight reflecting from the coins sparkled in Vance's eyes. He finished counting and pushed a small stack of coins toward Charlie. Charlie picked up the coins and jingled them in his hand.

"There you go, lad—enough money to keep you busy for the night, eh?" Vance grinned at Charlie and slipped the rest of the take into his money pouch. "Now I'll be off—I have business to attend to." He winked at Charlie and hurried off.

In the dark bedroom, Charlie took off his new suit and his new shoes, and put on his comfortable old homespun clothes. The hawthorn flowers that bloomed on his staff perfumed the room with the fresh scent of spring. He took the staff in hand and set out to find the Irish and do his father's bidding.

Night was settling over London as he left his rooms and made his way down the dark alley toward Covent Garden. Here and there, an oil lamp in a doorway illuminated the threshold of a shop. Charlie kept to one side of the narrow street, ducking beneath the hanging wooden shop signs. A few industrious shopkeepers had scattered cobblestones in front of their doorways. The stones, embedded in the hard-packed dirt of the alley, hurt Charlie's bare feet.

The street opened into a square crowded with stalls and people. The air was loud with the cries of sellers: "Chestnut, penny a score!" "Apples! Fine h'eating apples!" "Oysters, three for a penny. Fine and fresh. Oysters!"

A candle cast an uncertain light over a vegetable stall. The hot coals of the chestnut seller's stall shone with a hellish glow, painting the passersby as ruddy as devils. The oyster seller's makeshift stall was beneath a streetlamp. The wick in the oil-filled globe cast a puddle of feeble yellow light. The flickering light distorted people's faces, making them look pinched and angry.

Three gentlemen hurried through the square—swell gamblers by the look of them, on their way to a coffeehouse or a bordello. A young girl, no more than eight years old, trotted after them, calling out—"Please, gentlemen, do buy my flowers. Do buy a bunch please." As she passed the oyster seller's stall, the child lost her footing, tripping over a pothole in the street. She bumped into the stall and fell, dropping her flowers and knocking half a dozen shellfish into the street.

She was in the mud, scrambling after her fallen bouquets, when the oyster seller swore and lifted his hand to cuff her. In the flickering light, his face looked frozen and masklike, as if all human feeling had left him.

"Here now," Charlie called out. He stepped between the man and the child. "She didn't mean you any harm."

The oyster seller glared up at Charlie. "Blasted Irish whelp," he muttered, but he lowered his hand and stepped back, putting his stall between himself and the giant, clearly fearful.

Turning to the little girl, Charlie found her on her knees in the mud, gathering up her flowers. The blossoms were muddy and battered, and the child was weeping as she tried unsuccessfully to brush the filth from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the bouquets. He squatted beside her. "Now, lass," he murmured, not knowing what to say. "Come now, don't cry."

She ignored him, continuing to inspect her flowers through her tears. Charlie studied her a moment, then held out his staff, where the hawthorn flowers still bloomed. "Look here, lass. You can pick a new bouquet right here."

She glanced up and Charlie helped her to her feet. "There's a lass," he said, still holding out his staff. His legs were tired from squatting, and so he plucked the child from the mud and lifted her, supporting her on one arm. He held the staff in his other hand, where she might easily reach the blossoms. "Pick a bouquet," he urged her.

A few passersby, intrigued by Charlie's size, had stopped to watch him argue with the oyster seller. They lingered to watch the girl pluck flowers from the giant's staff. She picked a bunch and bound them together with a dirty bit of string that she pulled from some hidden pocket in the rags that served as her clothes. She picked another bunch, larger than the first. The watching crowd grew larger. Though clearly the staff should have been plucked bare, it was as thick with flowers as ever.

The girl picked a third bunch of flowers, working awkwardly with her right hand while her left arm cradled an enormous bouquet. Her arms were full when the giant set her down, and yet the staff still bore a crown of white blossoms. As the little girl passed among the crowd, selling flowers to people who marveled at how sweet and fresh they were, the crowd watched Charlie expectantly, awaiting his next trick.

"'Tis a miracle," murmured an elderly Irish apple seller. She wore her shawl over her graying hair and clenched a pipe in her teeth.

"It's nothing but a conjurer's trick," said a dapperly dressed young gentleman. "A very clever one, I admit. How do you do it, man?"

Charlie blinked at him, a little confused. "What do you mean?"

"Where did the flowers come from?" the man asked impatiently.

"From the soil of Ireland," Charlie said, giving as honest an answer as he knew how.

The man snorted in disbelief. "They never give away a trick," he said to the lady beside him. Before Charlie could speak again, the man reached out and took the staff from Charlie's hand to examine it. When the staff left Charlie's hand, the flowers wilted. Their petals showered to the ground, like an early snowfall. When Charlie took the staff back, the blossoms returned, fresh flowers opening where no buds had even been visible.

"Trickery," the man said, and pushed away through the crowd, the lady on his arm.

"Let us have another trick," said a lad in the crowd. He was a ragged young man, bold because he was surrounded by his mates, who were as ragged and dirty as he was. "Conjure us something."

Charlie looked around at the crowd, not knowing what to do. "I don't know any tricks. I have come here from Ireland to bring the Irish home."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Home to Ireland?" The bold lad made a rude sound, and his companions laughed. "I'd sooner go to blazes than go to Ireland."

"But you must go home," Charlie said. "The land, it needs you back."

"The land needs me," one of the lad's companions scoffed. "And what about what I need?"

"The land will give you what you need," Charlie said, confident as could be.

Another of the young men laughed. "I need a fine suit of clothes and a gold watch. Will the land give me that?"

The first lad shouted, "I need a coach and four fine horses. Will the land give me that?"

"I need a house in the country!"

"I need a roast goose for dinner!"

"I need five gold guineas!"

Charlie shouted above them. "These are not the things you need. You don't understand. I have come to take you back where you belong. You must listen to me."

But the crowd would not listen. Their pleasure seemed to border on hysteria: half of them were drunk; the others would like to be. Their laughter was not genuine and easy; it had a frantic edge to it.

"Do not waste yourselves in this foul city where you can't see the sky." Charlie's voice boomed over the babble of the crowd. "Come back to the island where you were born! Come with me!"

"And who are you to tell us what we must do?" shouted the first lad.

"I am my father's son," Charlie bellowed above the noise. "My father was a king. He sent me here."

"A king, you say?" The ragged lad laughed. "King of the beggars!"

Charlie protested, shaking his head. "No, a king of Ireland. He fought and—"

"King of the Vagabonds!" another young man cried.

"King of the Fools!" shouted a third.

"Aye, that is it," cried the first lad, taking up the shout. "King of the Fools! That is what we have." They surged around him, laughing and pulling at him, like a flock of starlings harrying a raven. "King of the Fools!"

They crowned him with a garland of watercress, snatched from a vegetable seller. They dressed him in a rude cape of flour-sacking, grabbed from the protesting baker. They would have done more, but a policeman came to stop the merriment, and the lads left Charlie sitting in the mud not far from Kathleen's stall.

Kathleen found him there when she stepped out to see what all the noise was about. Charlie was leaning against a wall on the edge of the square, the flour sacks around his neck, the garland drooping over one eye. He still clung to his staff.

Kathleen took pity on him, helping him from the mud, taking the garland from his head, using her kerchief to wipe the muck from a cut he had somehow gotten beneath his eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

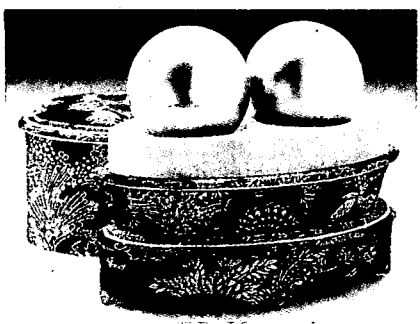
▼ BACKJACK CHAIR

Versatility, comfort and convenience—all in the new BackJack Chair. Upright, it's a firm back rest, for sitting, studying or reading. Flip it over and you have a recliner with a cushion headrest—perfect for T.V. watching or just relaxing. Extremely well constructed, BackJack features a tough zinc-plated steel frame. The seat boasts a polyurethane foam cushion and a removable cover crafted of all cotton army duck that is water repellant and mildew resistant. So now there's a chair for any room in your house—or take it along when you head for the beach, pool or campsite. **$26.98** ($6.00) #A1938-Red; #A1939-Blue; #A1940-Tan.

▼ WORDFINDER™

The worlds smallest and smartest electronic dictionary/thesaurus. Small enough to fit into your pocket, purse or briefcase, but large enough to include over 100,000 spelling words and 220,000 synonyms. It also includes 4.5 megabytes of information, proper names, major cities and states, jumble key for unscrambling words. (Great for those difficult spelling games.) Ideal for students, business executives, all who desire to improve and expand their use of the English language. Large 20 digit display with 9 operation indicators, auto shut-off. Weighs only 8 ounces. Uses 4 AAA batteries (included). 90 day warranty. **$119.98** ($5.00) #A1897.

▼ SHARE THE BENEFITS OF YING-YANG HEALTH SPHERES



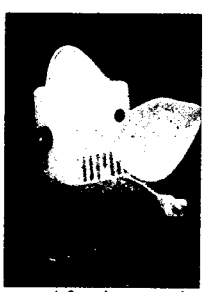
Ying Yang Health Spheres are traditionally given by the People's Republic of China to visiting heads of state. Now these Chinese treasures can be yours. Meticulously handcrafted, one sphere emits a high "female" pitch: the Ying; the other a low "male" pitch: the Yang. The Spheres are used by rotating them in the palm of the hand with the fingers. They have positive therapeutic benefits, exercising the delicate muscles and stimulating the nerves and acupuncture points. So, if you type, use a computer, play a musical instrument or engage in sports that rely on the powers of the fingers and wrist, Ying Yang Health Spheres can increase your agility and dexterity. #A1901 **$29.98** ($4.00).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ INFRARED IMPROVEMENT

Home infrared heat treatments are an increasingly popular form of natural pain relief. Now the means of applying that heat have been significantly improved. Heating surface has been tripled, the larger contour head comfortably angled for reaching neck and back. Replaceable interior infrared bulb is now 10w, giving 45% more heat. Reaches deeper than heating pads or hot water bottles. The new infra-lux has two heat settings: High and Low (plus off) which allows you to experiment and choose most comfortable setting. It comes with its own zippered vinyl bag for neat storage or packing for travel. UL-listed. **$39.98** ($4.25) #A1906.

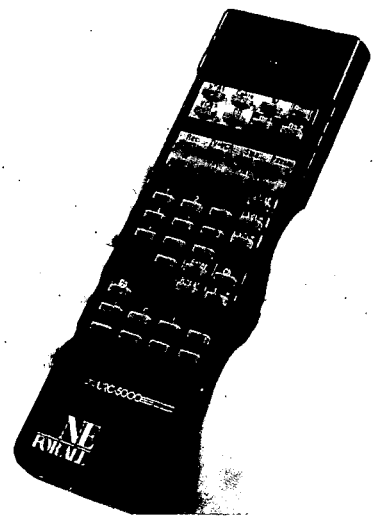
▼ MIGHTY LITTLE FAN



The most important qualities of a household fan are safety, quietness, portability and force enough to get the air circulating. We've found a little powerhouse of a fan that meets all these criteria admirably. This two-speed fan is completely safe — if the spin of the soft plastic blades is interrupted, the fan stops without so much as marking a finger. It moves an impressive volume of air. The blades measure 7" from tip to tip. We offer this fan in white for **$21.98** ($4.00) #A1604. Two for **$38.98** ($5.00) #A16042.

▼ A REMOTE FOR ALL REASONS

Looking for a way to simplify your handling of modern electronic gadgets? Then the One For All Remote Control is for you. Remarkably easy to use, it can replace up to 13 different remotes for your TV, cable, VCR, CD or other infrared appliances. When combined with its command center and X-10 modules (purchased separately) it can control lighting, infrared signal burglar alarms, and a host of small appliances. And, with its computer interface, it can be upgraded to work with the new, more advanced infrared-controlled security and energy management systems. So — simplify your life with the one remote that replaces all the rest. Includes 4 AAA batteries. 90 day limited warranty. 7½" H x 2⅜" W x ½" D. **$129.98** ($6.00) #A1907.



TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 050 IA, PO. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

© 1989 Magalog Marketing Group Inc.
1905 Swarthmore Ave Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What is it you did, to make those rowdy boys treat you so rudely?" she asked him.

He shook his head, obviously still bewildered by it all. "I only told them I had come to bring them home to Ireland."

Kathleen dabbed at his wound, making exasperated sounds beneath her breath. He was like a big child, he was. "Bring them home to Ireland?" You'll have to tie them up and put them in a box for that. They'll not go willingly."

He shivered in the cold of the night fog, shaking his head. "I don't understand these people. This place has changed them. This place makes people hard, scarcely people at all."

She shook her head. "They're people, right enough. People trying to make their way in a hard cruel world."

"'Tis a cold place, London. I have not been warm since I left Ireland," Charlie muttered.

He looked so mournful and hangdog. She cast about for a way to cheer him. "There are ways to warm yourself, Charlie. I'll show you a way out of the cold. We'll stop a bit at the Black Horse Tavern. You'll find more Irish there, right enough."

The Black Horse Tavern was crowded and noisy, ringing with the shouts of drunken young costermongers playing at cards, dice, and dominos. A whore who had paused to warm herself with gin was laughing at a bawdy joke; a pimple-faced apprentice stared at her half-exposed breasts and grinned. The air was close with the greasy aroma of roasting mutton.

Kathleen found them a place to sit at a rude wooden table and waved a hand to a serving man. "Gin will warm you," she muttered. "It'll warm you as you've never been warmed before."

The man brought them two glasses of gin, and she sipped at one. The liquor stung her lips and the biting aroma brought tears to her eyes, but it warmed her. A glass or two, and the pain in her hump would ease, the ache in her bones would subside. The gin was medicinal, she reckoned, and that was why she drank it. "It's a foul drink, but it eases a person," she said to Charlie.

Charlie tasted it gingerly. "It has more of a bite than whiskey," he said. "But it does warm me."

"That it does," she said. She leaned forward, resting her elbows on the table and looking up at Charlie, wondering what to do with him. An overgrown schoolboy, that's what he was. "Why don't you go home, Charlie? Go home to your mother's farm. You don't belong here."

He downed the rest of the glass of gin and shook his head. "My father told me I must bring the Irish home. I cannot go home alone."

Kathleen shook her head. "The Irish will never go home. We all talk of the green hills and how we long for them, but we remember the famines and the hardships as well. We won't go back."

"But you must," he said, his tone urgent. He had another glass of gin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and told her of falling asleep in the Giant's Boneyard. He told her of how his father came to him and told him what to do. "He gave me his sword," Charlie said, gesturing with the staff. "It's a magic thing. On the ship that carried me from Ireland, I waved my staff and a wind came to blow us to England." He leaned forward, his face already flushed from the gin. "And when I waved it over the river, the waters parted, leaving a path of dry land."

Kathleen sipped her gin and listened, watching his broad daft face. He was an innocent and a lunatic, that was clear enough. But she could not help thinking about the stories that her mother had told her when she was a little girl. Legends of giants and heroes and magical swords. Charlie's story began like an old tale—the enchanted son, the magic sword, the quest.

As Charlie talked, he drank gin, downing glass after glass. With each glass his words grew louder and made less sense. He was growing agitated. "And the Irish will follow me to the side of the sea," he said, his voice loud enough to cut through the noise of the tavern. "And I will wave my staff and the waters will part before me." He stood up, knocking over his bench and stretching his hands apart to show how the waters would open to let him through. "We will march across the empty seabed, walking back to the land where we belong."

"Sit down, Charlie," Kathleen said. "Calm yourself."

Around him, the costermongers and apprentices were staring and laughing.

"Come with me," he called to them, spreading his arms. "Come with me, my people. I will lead you back to Ireland." The gin had released a passion in him, and he shouted to be heard over the laughter and the rude shouts. "Follow me," he called to them. "Follow me back to Ireland."

Kathleen watched him sway just a little, made unsteady by the gin. He lifted his staff, and apprentices scrambled aside for fear of a clouting. Charlie strode into the gap, his head held as proudly as a king. He lifted his staff high, and the crowd parted, leaving him a path that he accepted as his due. "Follow me," he called, his voice slurred with drink. Kathleen stood to pursue him. The poor fool would never find his way home alone. But the crowd closed in behind him, leaving her to struggle slowly toward the door.

The night air was cold and Charlie was woozy from the gin. He found himself on the street, puzzled that no one had come after him. Surely in the tavern, when they had made way before him, they had planned to follow. But when he looked back, no one was there, not even Kathleen.

He had not meant to drink so much. But the gin had touched the empty spot that had been in his gut since he left Ireland, providing him with warmth and comfort.

When the wind blew, he shivered and shuffled in the direction that he thought might lead him to his rented rooms. His head seemed to have grown largely and unwiedly: his feet seemed very far away and very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slow in responding to his desires. He managed to walk just a few blocks before he sat down beneath a streetlamp for a little rest. Benumbed by gin, he fell asleep in the gutter.

On the far side of the street, a pair of whores trudged past, carefully picking their way through the garbage and filth from chamberpots. It was getting late, and law-biding citizens were at home in bed, their doors barred against cutthroats and robbers.

A dog ventured from the mouth of an alley where it had been feeding on scraps of garbage. The animal walked with a peculiar lurching gait, its right hind leg having been broken years before by the well-placed kick of a carriage horse. The bone had healed crooked, and the leg no longer touched the ground.

The dog sniffed Charlie. His suit smelled of roasting meat and gin, aromas from the Black Horse Tavern. Attracted by the man's body heat, the dog curled up by Charlie's side and went to sleep. In his sleep, Charlie moved a hand to encircle the dog.

For a time, the man and dog slept peacefully. A burning wick in the oil-filled globe that served as streetlamp cast a yellow light on Charlie's face. He smiled in his sleep.

Charlie was dreaming. In his dream, there was music: the singing of larks and the laughter of children filled the air. He was leading a triumphant procession made up of all the Irish who had left the island to seek their fortune in England. He was bringing them home, and they were all dancing after him. The girl who sold flowers was dancing with the rude lad who had called Charlie King of Fools. The girl's rags flapped around her legs and her bonnet had fallen back on her head. She and her partner were pale from lack of sun and thin from bad food, but already the sunshine was putting roses in their cheeks again. Everyone was dancing: the whore from the tavern; the old woman who sold apples; the mudlarks and the ragged Irish beggars from the streets of London.

Charlie danced at the head of the procession, laughing at the way the old apple-seller capered. Overhead the sky was blue, and the sun was on his face. The earth was warm beneath his bare feet. He led them through the country roads to his mother's farm, past the fields filled with growing grain, out to the Giant's Boneyard, where he lay down in the fragrant grass. He belonged here, among the bones of his father. With his head pillowed on his arm, he closed his eyes. In the distance he could hear people laughing and singing.

Someone was calling to him: "Charlie. Charlie Bryne. You can't just lie there like a great lump. Rouse yourself, man. Wake up."

Charlie blinked. Kathleen was shaking him awake. "Wake up you gin soaked lump," she grumbled at him. "The cold will be the death of you if you lie here all night."

Charlie squinted up at her. "What happened?" he mumbled. "Where did all the people go?" He stared at the houses around him—tall, gray, and foreboding in the dim light.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've been looking for you," Kathleen was saying. "I knew you couldn't find your way alone. Now where is it you're living?"

Charlie sat up, groaning with the effort. Disturbed by the movement, the dog that lay beside him stood up, shook itself, and wagged its tail tentatively. Absent-mindedly, Charlie reached over and rubbed the animal's ears.

"I lay down to rest for a time," Charlie said. "I felt mortally tired, Kathleen."

"Mortally drunk, more like it. You put away enough gin to fell an ox."

The dog leaned against Charlie's side, a small patch of warmth in the chilly night. Charlie's hand stroked the animal idly. "They didn't follow me, Kathleen. It seemed to me they would."

Kathleen reached out and touched his shoulder. "Go back home, Charlie. If you stay here, you'll die in the gutter with a bellyful of gin."

He straightened his shoulders. "The old blood runs in my veins. I'll bring my people home." Then the edge of doubt crept into his voice for the first time. "You believe me, Kathleen. Don't you?"

"You must get on home," she said in a weary voice. "Tell me where you live and I'll walk you there."

"'Tis right by a cane shop on a narrow street where a man can scarcely see the sky," Charlie said. "Not so far from Covent Garden."

"I know the one," Kathleen said. She held her hand out to him, coaxing him as if he were a wayward child. "Come along, Charlie. I'll take you home."

"It isn't my home," Charlie said stubbornly. "'Tis a place I live, nothing more."

"True, but it's a warm place to sleep, and for tonight you'd best settle for that," she said. "Now come with me."

Leaning on his staff, Charlie staggered to his feet. The dog moved away, wagging its tail in earnest. When Charlie stood, Kathleen's head did not reach his chest. He looked down at her and placed a hand on her shoulder, seeking the warmth of contact with another person as much as support. Charlie and Kathleen started off down the street, and the dog followed Charlie, trotting easily on all four legs.

Charlie sat in a chair by the fire. He had been on his feet all afternoon, answering questions from the gentry and showing off his size. His head ached with a blinding pain. For the past few days, the world seemed to close in around him when his head ached; his vision narrowed and blackness nibbled at the edges, like the premature coming of night. He closed his eyes for a moment.

"Hey there, lad," Vance said. Charlie heard Vance pull another chair close to the fire and sit down. "You all right?"

"I'm cold."

Charlie heard Vance poke the fire and toss some more coal on the grate. He could see the light of the fire dancing on the inside of his eyelids and feel the heat on his hands. But the warmth did not seem to penetrate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the skin. The fire could warm the surface, but his bones were cold. Only the sun and earth of Ireland could warm him deep down. The sun of Ireland or a glass of British gin.

Each night, he went out to the streets to preach to the Irish. There were some who came to hear him each night, a few who believed in him. The old apple-seller called him a saint and brought her ailing granddaughter to him for healing. The little flower seller sought him out—but that may have been for practical reasons; she could count on him for a supply of fresh blossoms. The rude young men called him a conjurer, a madman, a fool. The costermongers laughed at him. He offered to show them that he could make the river waters part, but no one would follow him to the riverside. Each evening ended the same way: in the tavern, drinking gin with Kathleen.

He blinked and Vance came into focus. The little man was leaning forward in his chair, peering into Charlie's face with a considering air. "You've been drinking too much, lad. Gin will be the death of you."

"This country will be the death of me," Charlie muttered.

"Right you are, lad." Vance was not paying attention. He was counting the take. When he handed Charlie his share, he frowned a little.

"Now don't spend it all on gin," Vance said. "You'd do well to stay home tonight."

Charlie stared at Vance. He did not like the man's proprietary tone. "I will go or stay as I please," he said slowly.

Vance stopped in the act of gathering up the coins. "Well sure, Charlie, of course you will. I was just saying, as a friend, that you . . ."

"I go to the ginhouses to find my people," Charlie interrupted. "I find them there, drinking gin to warm their bones. They miss the soil of Ireland, though they do not know that's what it is they're missing. They feel the hollowness, just as I feel it, and they drink gin to fill it. I go there to find them and bring them home." He stood up and glared down at Vance.

Vance studied the giant with cold, blank eyes. "Just take care not to sleep in the gutter, lad. Your cough's getting worse."

Charlie's shoulders slumped a little. His head ached and the power had gone from him. "Right you are, Joe. I'll not sleep in the gutter. I'm sorry, Joe."

Now that's enough of Charlie Bryne. Let's consider John Hunter, a man of science, as different from Charlie Bryne as a man could be. We can begin at Kathleen's stall in Covent Garden, on a chilly morning just a few weeks after she met Charlie.

The wind off the Thames blew through Kathleen's wool shawl and made her hump ache. A burly Scot dressed in a fine wool coat passed her stall and glanced into the shadows where she sat.

"You there," he said. "Have you seen the man with the dancing monkey? I'm looking for him."

"I have not seen him this morning." She studied the gentleman, won-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dering if she might earn a penny from him. It was bitter cold, and she had only told a single fortune that day. "I might see him later. I could give him a message."

The Scot glanced at her, his expression cautious, but strangely greedy. "I hear his monkey died," he said softly.

"I heard the same." The animal had died of a chill and the man was grief-stricken, mourning the loss of the income from the monkey's dancing.

His voice dropped a little further. "I have a need for the animal's body," he said. "I will pay handsomely. Here." He fumbled in his pocket. "A penny to tell the man that John Hunter has an offer for him." He held out the coin.

John Hunter—she knew the name. Surgeon to the King, he was. And, from the stories that she had heard, an unnaturally curious man. When the tiger died at the Royal Zoo, he had anatomized the beast and mounted the skeleton. When the Siamese twins in the Covent Garden freak show died, rumor had it that the manager had sold the body to Hunter for a tidy sum. People said he was a body-snatcher and a resurrectionist.

"And what would you do with the body?" she asked him. "You'll anatomize it, won't you?" She hadn't cared much for the monkey—a dirty, noisy animal that spent more time scratching for fleas than it did dancing. But it seemed unnatural to want to poke and pry into its innards. "Why don't you let the poor beast rest in peace?"

"Would you bury the beast so its body can rot, benefiting no one?" he asked angrily. "Why is it that people have no trouble eating the meat of a cow—but they consider it wrong to examine the dead animal too closely? Yes, I'll anatomize the beast. I'll examine the organs and see what killed it. I'll study the muscles and mount the bones so that I can study them later. And when I'm done, I'll add a few humble observations to our knowledge of natural philosophy." His tone was bitter, and she had a feeling he was talking to himself, as much as to her. "A patient of mine—a young boy—died today of a coughing disease. When I wished to examine his lungs, to see how the disease affected them, what influence my treatment had had, his father forbade it. The ignorant fool. What I learned from his son's body might have helped me heal another child. But instead his son's body must rot in peace and children must go on dying. How can I learn to cure what ails people, if I can't observe the action of disease on a body? Would you have doctors continue in ignorance, peddling salves and tonics that work indifferently well? Little better than butchers, most of them."

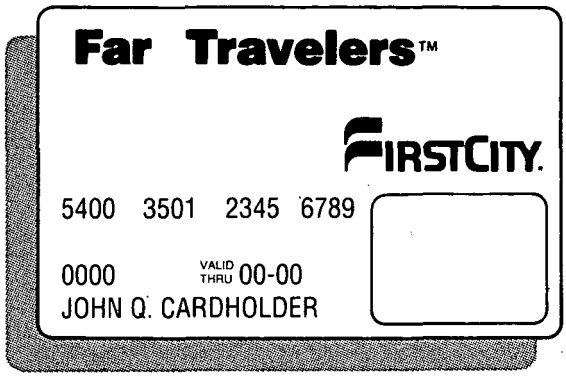
Kathleen stayed in the shadows, startled by his vehemence.

He held out the penny again, his face softening as if he repented his outburst. "Come on, lass, take the penny and tell the man if you see him." He glanced at the sign that a clerk had sketched for Kathleen in exchange for his fortune: an open hand with the palm exposed, the life line marked in black ink. "I'll give you another penny to tell my fortune."

For two pennies, she left her stool and stepped from her stall. In the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Shape of Things to Come



As a reader of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* you are keenly interested in the shape of things to come, our potential futures, and how science and technology will affect the spectrum of human experience.

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine challenges its readers to speculate beyond the mundane and day-to-day. We want our readers to ponder, question and debate the impact scientific inquiry and discovery will have on the way humans live, relate to one another (as individuals and nations), conserve their environment, and express themselves intellectually and artistically.

The Shape of Things to Come

In a world of mundane credit cards, the "Far Travelers" MasterCard is the only credit card created exclusively for readers of science fiction.

The unique design identifies you as an individual committed to the exploration of human potential.

When you use the "Far Travelers" MasterCard, you will help ensure humanity's continued Far Travels into space because...

Every time you buy something with the "Far Travelers" MasterCard, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* will contribute a percentage of the price to the National Space Society.

The National Space Society is the leading advocacy organization for space exploration. The Society seeks to generate public support for the space program through its education programs, and encourages space-related research by private industry.

The "Far Travelers" MasterCard is the only credit card that enables you to deepen humanity's commitment to the exploration of space.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The "Far Travelers" MasterCard
will serve you well in this world.

- There's no annual fee for one full year!*
- A competitive interest rate of prime plus 7.7%*
- 25 day interest-free grace period when your balance is paid in full each month.*
- Instant Cash at ATMs and bank locations throughout the world.
- $250,000 Travel Accident Insurance at no extra cost.
- Purchase Security protects virtually anything you buy with your credit card for 90 days, Extended Protection doubles manufacturer's warranty for up to one year.

First City MasterCard
Terms and Conditions

Annual Percentage Rate for Purchases	18.2%
Variable Rate Information	The Annual Percentage Rate may vary. The rate is determined by adding 7.7% to the Prime Rate listed in the "Money Section" of the *Wall Street Journal* published after the 15th of the month preceding the first day of the billing cycle.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	You will have 25 days after the statement date to repay your outstanding balance in full before being charged a finance charge on new purchases.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average Daily Balance (including new transactions) Method
Annual Fees	Membership Fee: $20.00 per year. Under this offer, the annual fee will be waived the first year. At the beginning of the second year, the annual fee will be billed to your account automatically.
Minimum Finance Charge	None
Transaction Fee For Purchases	None
Transaction Fee for Cash Advances: $1.50 **Late Payment Fee:** $15.00 **Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee:** $15.00	
The disclosures above are accurate as of the date of printing on 12/12/89. These terms are subject to change after this date. Call First City Bank-Sioux Falls, N.A. at 1-800-641-7878 for any changes in the terms disclosed.	

FIRSTCITY.
First City Bank - Sioux Falls, N.A.

If you would like an application, please call (800) 641-7878.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light of the sun, he saw her clearly for the first time. "Ah," he said. His voice was that of a man discovering an unexpected treasure. He stared at her honestly, not troubling to hide his interest. "Your back—how long has it been like that?"

"Since I was a babe." She pulled the shawl more tightly around her shoulders—distressed both by the cold and by the way he studied her. She was used to people who stared—but his interest was more intense than that of the casual passerby.

"Does it pain you?" he asked.

She nodded cautiously. "When the weather's cold, it does." She took the two coins and held his hand in hers, turning the palm up to the light so that she could study the lines. She stared for a moment, and the patterns emerged from the crisscrossing lines. "You will meet someone very important, very powerful. He has something you want very much. Some secret you are lacking." She frowned at the lines. "You want something and you get it, but when you do, it will not be what you want." She shook her head, staring at the lines. "There is something that you do not understand, something important."

He laughed abruptly at this last. "That is not the future. That is now. There are many things I do not understand."

She shook her head and released his hand. "That is all I can tell you now." She started to turn away, but he called her back.

"Wait," he said urgently. "I have a salve that might help your aches." He wet his lips and his expression was that of a greedy child. "If you come to my examination room, I will give you some. My house is on Jermyn Street. Anyone nearby can tell you the way there."

Kathleen studied his face. He did, in his own peculiar way, wish to give her relief from the pain. But he also had an unhealthy desire to know the twists of her bones. She did not trust him.

"I would like to examine you," he said. "Perhaps I can help."

"I'll give some thought to it," she said, and turned away from the eagerness in his eyes. She had lived in London long enough to be wary.

John Hunter was, without a doubt, a curious man. He started out as a curious boy, naturally enough.

When John was just eight, he found a burrow in the winter-blasted kitchen garden of his parents' Scottish farm. Curious about the animal inside, he dug beneath the frost into the cold soil, where he found a toad lying in a tunnel of its own making. The animal was cold and motionless—by all appearances, stone dead. But when he held it tightly, he thought he felt a stirring inside the cold body—the beating of its tiny heart. He slipped the animal into the pocket of his britches and smuggled it past his mother into the house.

He set the stiff creature just behind the coal scuttle, where it would be warmed by the heat of the fire, and left it there during supper. When he checked on it just before bed, the creature had stirred to reluctant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life. It blinked at him lazily and then slowly hopped across the hearth rug.

His mother caught him. "What have you there, Johnnie? Lord save me—where did you get that beast?"

Despite his protests, she cast the toad back into the garden. In the morning, he found the chilly corpse huddled beneath a clump of straw. He warmed it in his hands, but it did not move. He snuck it into the house and warmed it by the fire, but the beast did not return to life. He puzzled over it: why had the beast perished when it was returned to the cold?

In the back of the chicken run, where his mother wouldn't catch him, John anatomized the body with his pocket knife, delving into its innards to see if he could learn why the beast had died.

John Hunter grew up. As a boy of twelve, he loitered with his cousin by the churchyard. His parents were inside, christening his youngest sister. Bored with the proceedings and ignored by the adults, the boys had slipped from the church.

Late afternoon clouds hung low in the sky, as gray as the tombstones in the churchyard. John and his cousin leaned on the stone wall, idly chatting.

"The churchyard's haunted," John's cousin said. "At night, the ghost of old man MacDonald wanders among the graves, looking for children who are out too late." MacDonald, an old man who had died a month before, had had a reputation for disliking small boys.

John looked doubtful.

"You don't believe in ghosts?" His cousin's tone was challenging.

John considered the question carefully. He was a methodical boy. "I've never seen one. Have you?"

His cousin hesitated, and then decided to stick to the truth. "No, but I've heard about them." He wet his lips, studying John's face. "If you don't believe in ghosts, then I dare you to run around the old man's grave. Three times. Counterclockwise."

John thought about it. "If I run 'round it counterclockwise, that'll bring bad luck," he said. "I believe in bad luck."

"Then just go out and touch the grave and come back. I dare you."

John stared out into the graveyard. It seemed darker now—the low hanging clouds stole the light from the day. The old man's grave was a long way off. He was afraid—but he was also curious, and the second emotion was the more powerful of the two. What would a ghost look like?

"Or else you have to say that you believe in ghosts," his cousin went on.

In the end, it was John's own curiosity, not his cousin's taunting, that drove him on. John climbed the churchyard wall, scuffing the knee of his best pants against the damp stone. With a nonchalance he did not feel, he strolled toward the grave. The graveyard was very quiet. In the hush, he listened to the tiny skittering sounds of birds in the trees, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whisper of his pantlegs brushing against the wet grass. Suddenly brave, he reached out and touched the wing of a stone angel. Cool stone, nothing more. The air smelled of dampness and fresh-turned soil, only that. He slowed his footsteps, waiting for something to happen in the stillness. He glanced back at his cousin and was startled by how far he had come: his cousin's face was a spot of white against the darkness of the church-wall.

When he reached the old man's grave, he laid his hand on the stone and waited. Nothing happened. He stood still, almost disappointed. He had, up to that moment, been willing to believe in the ghost, if the ghost had chosen to present himself. John lingered for a moment, studying the new stone marker, chose a single flower from the bouquet beside the grave, and then walked back.

From a distance, he could see his cousin's face, his wide eyes. John handed his cousin the flower from the old man's grave. "I guess I don't believe in ghosts," he said, and realized it was true.

Years later, John climbed another graveyard wall—this one in London. The stones were slippery beneath his hands. It was a moonless night in early winter. John Hunter and a fellow student, bent on acquiring essential supplies for their anatomy classes, wore workmen's clothing that was stained with clay from past excursions.

John ghosted along the paths of the deserted graveyard, sniffing the air for the scent of freshly dug earth. At the far corner of the yard, he found what he was looking for: the new grave of a young woman, dead of childbirth just one day past.

Thomas, his colleague, lifted the flowers that decorated the grave aside, setting them on a nearby grave. Working quickly, John started digging, using a wooden shovel to avoid the tell-tale rattle of metal on stones. Thomas spread a canvas sheet over the grass, and John heaped the loose soil on top of the cloth. The exertion of digging warmed him pleasantly. When he tired of digging, Thomas took over, digging silently while John kept watch.

"Is that a sound?" Thomas whispered, looking up from the grave and cocking his head in the direction of the church.

"Just the wind," John muttered. "Nothing more."

Thomas shivered, looking over his shoulder. "A nasty business, this," he murmured. "I don't like it."

John glanced at his friend and shook his head. "Hush," he said. "Too much talk." John took another turn in the grave, digging quickly down to the coffin lid. He neatly slipped the broad iron hooks under the edges of the lid, up near the head of the coffin. He climbed from the grave and then he and Thomas hauled up on the rope. The lid cracked with a dull splintering sound, and John lowered himself onto the grave to lift the broken wood out.

After that, it was easy enough to slide a rope around the shoulders of the corpse and pull her through the opening. They stripped the body

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—stealing clothing carried a greater penalty than stealing a body alone —and slipped the naked cadaver into a canvas sack. They refilled the grave, leaving no evidence that they had passed that way.

John arranged the flowers tenderly on the grave, then slung the sack over his shoulder. The two men left the graveyard as silently as they had come.

After delivering their burden to their surgical school, they stopped in the tavern. John was cheerful, but he noticed that Thomas seemed morose. "What is it, Thomas, my lad? We did a fine job—the body's in the school, ready for tomorrow's lesson, and there's no harm done."

Thomas shook his head. "Doesn't it bother you?" he asked softly.

John looked up from his beer. "What should be bothering me?"

"Creeping about in the churchyard at night," Thomas murmured.

John took another swallow of beer. He did not understand Thomas' need to chatter on about the matter. John was not fond of the late-night escapades, but he accepted them as necessary to his training as a surgeon and took them as a matter of course. He could not learn about human anatomy without dissecting cadavers.

"If we do not get the bodies, we cannot learn anatomy," John said. "And if we do not learn anatomy, then how can we be surgeons?" It seemed obvious enough.

Thomas shrugged, staring into his beer. "It doesn't sit right," he said. "That's all."

John studied his friend's face, frowning. "What is it that bothers you, Thomas? The woman is dead and gone. We cannot hurt her by taking her body."

Thomas was watching him with a peculiar expression. John shook his head, bewildered by his friend's mood. It seemed to him sometimes that understanding human anatomy was simple compared to understanding the peculiarities of the human heart.

There was, perhaps, a bit of something missing in John Hunter, some bit of human sympathy, some bit of wonder, some bit of fear of the unknown. You might say he was a brave man, but it was not truly bravery, because he saw no reason to be afraid. You might say he was a devil, completely lacking in common human compassion, but you would be wrong there as well. He had compassion of a sort—he dearly desired to help those who were ailing and in pain. But he lacked a sympathy with those who would leave the dead untouched. When life had fled, a body—be it mother or wife or beloved child—was dead meat. He did not understand those who saw it differently.

And so John Hunter became a surgeon. But he did not limit his investigations to the human body. He was a man of boundless curiosity, eager to investigate everything that nature had to offer. He concerned himself with the habits of hedgehogs, the animal heat of growing vegetables, the behavior of cuckoo birds, and the natural history of the viviparous lizard. He collected information like a jackdaw gathering shiny bits of metal. He discovered, by experiment, that the heart of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frog continued beating hours after the animal's spinal cord had been severed. He learned that eels could survive near-freezing temperatures. He developed a method for artificially stimulating the production of pearls by river mussels. In all his studies, he found human curiosities most interesting. By examining anomalies, he felt he could gain an understanding of the normal way of things.

Now of course Charlie Bryne and John Hunter must come together—you know that as well as I do. And so it was that on a sunny day, John Hunter went down to Covent Garden. He had stopped at the freak show to see if the showman had obtained any specimens for him. Every now and again, the man picked up something that John found of interest: the tattooed forearm of a South Sea Islander, for example, preserved in brine by a seaman with a liking for oddities; or the skull of a pig that was born with a single eye.

That afternoon, the showman had nothing to offer, and John strolled through the market. As he walked past an aisle of vegetable stalls, he heard the sweet song of a greenfinch, sounding over the calls of the melon seller. He followed the birdsong to the end of the aisle. There a man stood beside a cage filled with songbirds that chirped and fluttered their wings against the rough wooden slats. In his hand, the birdseller held a smaller cage, in which a gaudily colored bird sat on a perch.

"It's God's truth," the bird seller was saying to a young woman. "I bought this bird from a sailor who had just come from the West Indies. A bird like this—why it can be taught to talk just as clear as a person. Two shillings is an uncommonly low price for such a bird."

John stepped closer, peering at the bird. Without a doubt, the bird was a greenfinch; the gaudy colors were painted on.

"That's too dear for me," the young woman said, stepping back from the cage. "Though I'm sure it's a wonderful bird."

The birdseller cast John a glance and decided he was the more likely prospect. "You look like a discerning gentleman, sir, one who would appreciate a rare bird. Very rare, indeed."

John snorted. "You're a fool, man, or you take me for one. The bird is a greenfinch that you've painted up like a Drury Lane tart." John pursed his lips and whistled a credible imitation of the greenfinch's song. The bird in the cage stirred in response, then returned the song, staring about as if searching for its rival.

"What a pretty song," the birdseller exclaimed. "I've never heard a greenfinch sing like that in all my days."

"Then you've never heard a greenfinch sing," John said abruptly. The attempt at deception, however clumsy, annoyed him. "A greenfinch is worth three pence, but with a little paint, you've more than tripled the price. I've half a mind to . . ."

The birdseller's eyes widened as he looked past John. "You there," he cried. John looked around in time to see finches and sparrows explode through an opening in their cage and make for the open sky. Beside the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cage stood an enormous man. In one hand he held the slat that he had ripped from the cage; in the other, a wooden staff decorated with hawthorn blossoms.

"God save us!" shouted the birdseller, running to the broken cage. The last of the sparrows flicked its tail and took flight, leaving the cage empty save for loose feathers and bird droppings. The birdseller began to shriek. "You blasted noddy-headed fool!" He turned on the big man, raising his hand as if to strike.

The man straightened to his full height and glared down at the birdseller. "They wanted to go free," the big man said.

John stared at the giant, amazed at his dimensions. He had, on occasion, visited freak shows that advertised tall men or giants, but this man topped them all.

The birdseller lowered his hand, his fury tempered by a fearful respect. But he continued shouting. "Who's going to pay for my birds? They were my livelihood, and now they've flown. I'll call the constable on you, you great lout."

"Here, man," John said hastily. "I'm sure that the constable would be interested in this foreign bird that you painted at home."

The birdseller glanced uneasily at his one remaining bird. "Now, sir, there's no need of that. This quarrel is none of yours."

John reached into his purse. "Stop your shouting," he said, handing the man a few coins. "Take this for your trouble, and leave well enough alone."

"Hours of collecting for nothing." The birdseller continued complaining bitterly as he pocketed the coins.

"What about that one?" the giant asked, waving a hand at the caged bird.

John dug two shillings from his pocket and took the cage. Then he glanced again at the giant and suggested, with a jerk of his head, that they leave the place before the grumbling birdseller changed his mind. The giant led the way down to the River Thames. At the river steps, he sat down and held out a hand for the cage. Heedless of the mud and fascinated by the big man, John sat on the stone beside him.

"Poor bird," the giant muttered, looking at the greenfinch.

"The color will wash off," John said. "I'm sure the birdseller used the cheapest paint he could find."

The giant opened the cage door and the bird hopped out onto the man's finger. He splashed the bird with river water. The runoff was scarlet, and the tail feathers lost a touch of color.

John marveled at the bird's passivity—no doubt it was stunned by the heat of the day. But more than that, he marveled at the giant. A magnificent specimen, John thought. He wondered, gazing at the man's oversized hand, what the bones looked like underneath. Ah, what he would give for a skeleton like this man's in his collection.

The man's face was broad and young-looking. His blue eyes were a little wild—a hint of lunacy there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why did you pay for the birds I let go?" the giant asked John.

"I wanted to make your acquaintance," John answered honestly. "I've never seen a man as big as you before." He was watching the giant closely. "Do your hands pain you? I noticed the knuckles seemed reddened."

"They ache, right enough."

"I thought so. Your knees and hips—they give you pain, too?"

"My knees, and hips, and feet, and hands. They all ache, God save me. They have since I came to London."

John nodded thoughtfully. "I have a salve that might help a bit with that," he said slowly. "Worth a try. If you'd like to come to my office, I could give you some."

The giant looked down at John. He seemed to be grateful for the man's attention. "Perhaps I will."

Just a few days later, in the dissecting room of his Jermyn Street house, John Hunter instructed a group of would-be surgeons in human anatomy. The corpse of an old man lay face down on the dissecting table. Over the course of his instruction, Hunter had neatly laid back the layers of skin and fibrous tissue covering the muscles of the lower leg, lecturing his students on the treatment of injuries to the Achilles tendon. He stressed, as always, the need to experiment and observe.

Only after dissecting the leg to the hip did he complete his lecture and dismiss the students. He watched them go, wondering if any of the lot would ever amount to much. Or would they become like their learned teachers at St. George's, relying on historical hearsay, failing to test and experiment and observe?

Hunter removed his bloodstained smock and washed his hands in a basin of clear water. He was climbing the stairs that connected his basement dissecting room with the rest of the house, when Mrs. Shields, the housekeeper, appeared in the doorway.

"A tall man named Charlie Bryne is here to see you," she said, looking a little flustered. "A very tall man."

"Very good, Mrs. Shields," John exclaimed. "Very good indeed. Send him right in."

The giant stood uneasily by the fire, in the small room that served as John Hunter's examination room. He was out of his element, John thought. By the river, he had seemed confident, powerful. In this confined space, he lacked that expansive vitality. His shoulders were hunched, as if the ceiling were pressing too close. His face was pale. His hands were clasped behind his back, like a schoolboy who had been told not to touch anything. John studied him, estimating how large a display case he would need for the skeleton.

"I've come for that salve you told me about," Charlie said. "I thought it might help warm me."

"I'm so glad you could come," John exclaimed. "Sit down. Mrs. Shields

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will bring us some tea—or perhaps a glass of sherry. That would help warm you."

"I've never had sherry," Charlie said.

"Then you must try it now," John said. "Please sit down." He gestured to a chair. "How's the greenfinch? Did its feathers come clean?"

Charlie nodded. "It flew off. Back to the country."

Mrs. Shields brought the sherry, pouring the glasses and setting the tray down on the table by the fire. John lifted his glass and smiled at Charlie. "Here's to the birds. I'm glad they didn't die uselessly in the smokes of London."

"Aye," Charlie said, and sipped his sherry.

John hesitated for a moment, considering his words, then spoke quickly, eager not to miss the opportunity. "Would you mind if I took a few measurements while you're here? Your body temperature, your heart rate—a few simple things, really."

Charlie frowned. "Why do you want all that?"

John chose his words carefully. "I study people like you," he said.

Charlie shook his head. "I do not think there are any other people like me."

John waved a hand to dismiss the objection. "Not precisely like you," he said. "Not giants. But people who are smaller than most, or bigger, or somehow different. The differences are where Nature's secrets lie. I have dedicated myself to the study of amazing things. By studying these things, I learn about the world. If I knew why some lambs grew two heads, I'd know why most grow only one."

Charlie finished his glass of sherry and John poured him another. "Why do you want to know that?"

John set his glass of sherry on the table and leaned forward. "Your body is a remarkable machine, Charlie. When you will it, your fingers move, your eyes blink, you stand, you sit." He reached out and tapped lightly on Charlie's chest. "Your heart beats in your chest, steady as a clock. Why?" John sat back. "You grow and keep on growing, so much larger than other men. Why?"

"Because the old blood runs in my veins," Charlie said, but John ignored the interruption.

"The answer's in there," John said. "In your body. Ticking like a clock."

Charlie glanced uneasily at his own chest.

"I want to understand these things," John murmured.

"Perhaps you cannot understand," Charlie said. He drained his second glass of sherry and held out his glass so that John could fill it again.

"I just don't know enough," John said. "Nature is keeping her secrets, but I will outsmart her." He sipped his own sherry. "If you will do me the great favor of letting me take a few measurements . . ."

Charlie shrugged. "As you like," he said.

John counted Charlie's pulse, took his temperature, measured his height, his girth, the length of his hands, his feet, the reach of his outstretched hands, and the circumference of his head. As he worked, noting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each measurement in the pages of a little book, John made conversation. "I have the bones of a great whale, strung together just as they were when the animal lived. Fascinating creature."

"I have never seen a whale," Charlie said. "Biggest fish there is, they say."

"I've never encountered a live one, but a student of mine supplied me with the pickled carcasses of two smallish specimens. They're less like a fish, from the build of their skeleton, and more like a cow."

"A cow that spends all its life at sea?" Charlie commented. "Not bloody likely."

John shrugged. "They lack the gills of a fish, but have lungs of a sort. Most peculiar. I've preserved their skeletons in my museum. The skeleton betrays much about the working of the body." He settled back into his chair, done with measurements for just then. "We share an interest in natural history," John said. "Perhaps you would like to come to my country house sometime. See my gardens, my menagerie. A pleasant break from the streets of London." He watched Charlie's face for a sign of fear. Ah, the man was an innocent; he smiled at John.

"I'd like that," Charlie murmured. "That I would."

They became friends, of a sort. On many a fine afternoon, John went to meet Charlie at his rooms. Sometimes, he brought the giant a bottle of sherry and they sat by the fire and talked. John brought a salve that seemed to ease the pain in Charlie's hands, though he still complained of aching knees and hips. He seemed to feel most comfortable by the fire.

In his own way, John genuinely liked the giant. The man fascinated him. John had decided quite early in their acquaintance that Charlie was quite mad. He had a peculiar turn of mind—he told John quite seriously about the most amazing things: haunted meadows and ghostly kings and magic swords. John could tell, from Charlie's wild tale of his own conception, that the man was of illegitimate birth. Charlie told John about his quest—he had to bring the Irish back to Ireland—and John nodded politely, accepting this as just one more indication of the giant's madness.

John was struck by the giant's remarkable staff and its seemingly permanent crown of flowers, though he gave no credence to the miracles Charlie claimed it had performed. He examined it closely, verifying that the blossoms sprouted directly from the wood. He had heard that the branches of certain trees in the West Indies continued to bear leaves even after they had been cut from the parent tree, and he speculated that the staff might be of a similar plant, one that only resembled the common hawthorn. He wanted to cut the staff in half to see if the wood were green inside, but Charlie would not allow it, would not even allow the staff out of his sight.

As the weeks passed, it became obvious that London did not agree with Charlie. Clearly, the man was dying. His hands trembled as he raised a glass of sherry to his lips; he could never get warm. He developed a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cough that shook his frame like an oak tree in a gale. His skin grew pale and broken blood vessels in his nose and cheeks betrayed his affection for gin. He took to wearing shoes, trying desperately to keep his feet warm. John noted Charlie's decline with a mixture of regret and anticipation. He would miss the opportunity to study the living giant, of course, but he was eager to examine the body and bones.

He worried, sometimes, about Charlie's drinking habits. If the giant died in the gutter, who could know where his body might end up. Body snatchers abounded, and John feared that some other surgeon might obtain the body.

It was during this time, on a fine sunny afternoon, that John took Charlie to his country house at Earl's Court. They rode in John's coach, though the giant had to hunch his shoulders and bow his head to fit in the seat. The lethargy that had grown habitual seemed to drop away from the giant as soon as they left London. Charlie stared out the window, grinning at the trees and meadows.

"It's wonderful," he said. "Just wonderful to see green fields again."

At Earl's Court, John took Charlie around the grounds, showing him the exotic beasts and fowl. Charlie gaped at the zebra and smooth-skinned Asian water buffalo that shared a paddock, shook his head in amazement at the two young leopards and the African lion. In the conservatory, he marveled at John's beehive, a box that had been built of plate glass. Beneath the glass, the worker bees hurried through the complex combs, going about their business. Through the glass and from the surrounding fields came the faint sound of buzzing.

"It reminds me of home," Charlie said, his voice a soft rumble. "I used to sleep in my mother's fields, listening to the sound of the bees in the clover. A beautiful sound."

"I've studied the pitch of their humming and compared it to the pianoforte," John said. "It's treble A above middle C."

Charlie did not seem to be listening. He was leaning close to the glass, watching the workers making their way through the combs. "So many of them, so busy."

"An average of approximately 3,400 to a hive, by my count. And there's always a queen bee, you know. In every hive I've checked."

Charlie held out his hand, and a bee that was returning from the fields landed on a finger.

"Careful there," John said. "They've a nasty, irritable temper. I was stung four times last week."

"They'll not sting me," Charlie said. The insect crawled over the massive hand, its wings buzzing, but it never stung.

"Come," said John. "There's more to see."

John led the way to the fishpond, where he bred carp, tench, leeches, and eels for experiments. On the way, he noticed that larks, finches, and other small birds seemed to be particularly abundant in the fields that day—the grass was alive with them. They fluttered up from the grass before them, circling the giant's head before flying away. Once, to John's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

amazement, a lark landed on Charlie's shoulder, tipped back its head to release a torrent of song, then flew away. John was wondering at what had brought the birds to this place when Charlie fell behind. John looked back to see the man unfastening his shoes. One large foot was already bare.

"Feels good underfoot," Charlie said. "Warm. Not like the streets of London." He took off his other shoe and set the pair beside a fencepost. Straightening up, he lifted his arms over his head in a prodigious stretch. He looked healthier than he had for weeks.

"The sunshine agrees with you," John commented. He considered the giant for a moment. "You could stay here for a time, if you like." That would solve so many problems—Charlie might live longer, but John would no longer have to worry about losing the body. The situation would be under his control.

Charlie's face brightened momentarily, but then he frowned and shook his head. "I cannot do that."

"I could take you into London, now and again," John persisted. "But you could stay here the rest of the time. The city air's unhealthy. It does you no good."

Charlie shook his head stubbornly. "Until I can return to Ireland, I must stay in London. That is where the Irish are and that is where I must stay."

"As you will," John said. He considered, as he walked, whether the right time had come to ask the giant about his bones. He tried to introduce the notion of scientific investigation gently. "You must see my other animals." He led the way back to the paddocks surrounding the house. He stopped by the pig pen and leaned on the fence. "I've found pigs to be the best for experimentation. They are easily managed and breed well in captivity." The old sow had pushed close to the fence and was staring up at Charlie. The tall man leaned over to scratch the top of her head, and she sighed in contentment.

"What has happened to her piglets?" Charlie asked. All three of the young animals bore scars on their right hind leg and limped a little.

"They are part of an experiment," John explained. "I am investigating the way bones grow. The French botanist Henri Duhmamel du Monceau claims that they increase by accretion throughout their length. I maintain that they grow from the extremities." He explained his experimental procedure to Charlie. He had operated on all the piglets. On each one, he had laid bare the bone of the right rear leg, drilled two holes precisely two inches apart, inserted lead shot in the holes, and then stitched up the incision again. Following the operation, John was butchering the piglets one by one at weekly intervals and checking the bone. Though the leg bone had lengthened overall, the distance between the deposits of lead was the same as it had been on the day that he inserted it. This supported his hypothesis that bones grew through accretion at the ends, not in mid-span.

Charlie stared at the piglets in the pen. "Why is it you want to know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how bones grow?" he asked at last. "Isn't it enough that they do? By God's grace, they grow quite well."

"Can't always trust in God's grace," John said briskly.

"What else is there?"

"'Knowledge," John said. "Sometimes, they do not grow, or they grow improperly. I want to know why." He gazed at the piglets. "There is so much to know," he murmured. "Do you know, Charlie, if I could look at your bones, I might be able to tell why they pain you so. It would not help you, but it might help someone else whose bones ache."

"My bones?" Charlie stared at him, his eyes suddenly wide. "You want to see my bones?"

"When you die, Charlie, as we all must do," John said gently. "If I could take your body . . ."

Charlie was backing away from him, his expression shocked. "My bones, John? What would you do with my bones?"

"Examine them, Charlie." John spread his hand, the gesture of a reasonable man making a reasonable proposal. "You'll have no more use for them, once you're dead."

Charlie was shaking his head. His big hands formed fists at his sides. "My bones must return to Ireland," he said. "That's where they belong. I promised my father . . ."

"Superstition, Charlie," John said gently. "You must not take it so seriously."

Charlie turned and fled. Startled by Charlie's reaction, John called after him, but the giant did not look back. John ran after him, but did not have a chance of overtaking him. Finally, he let the man go, knowing that he would eventually return to his rooms in London.

John was sorry that Charlie had reacted so precipitously. He reviewed the conversation in his mind, wondering how he might have made his suggestion more delicately. In the end, he decided that nothing he could have said would have overcome the giant's superstition, so John made peace with himself. He spent that night at Earl's Court, dissecting a series of worker bees, an exacting task that soothed his nerves.

The next day, on his morning stroll, John noticed a new variety of flower growing in the meadow. The plants grew low to the ground and bore tiny golden blossoms. They grew only in discrete patches. John realized, on close examination, that the flowers had sprouted in the giant's footprints. He attributed this curious effect to the compression of the soil beneath Charlie's feet and drew up plans for a series of experiments to test the sprouting of seeds under pressure.

Charlie heard John's voice calling him back, but he did not stop. In his haste, he dropped his shoes and left them behind, escaping John Hunter's voice.

It was a cold afternoon, and the walk back to London was a long one. A farmer gave him a ride for a few miles in an ox-drawn cart filled with straw, but he walked the rest. His legs ached by the time he reached the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outskirts of the city proper. He let his head hang, unwilling to look up and see the smoky sky overhead. The road was cold and hard beneath his bare feet.

When rain began to fall, he made no effort to take shelter. The cold drops soaked his coat, plastered his hair to his head, ran down his cheeks like dirty tears, leaving tracks of soot behind.

Back at the rooms, he fell ill and lay on the straw ticking mattress that served as his bed, unable and unwilling to move. "It's the gin," Vance said. "I told you it'd be the death of you." Charlie did not reply. He lay on the pallet of blankets that served as his bed, staring into the flames of the fire.

A few days later, Kathleen found him there. When he did not come to visit her stall in Covent Garden, she came looking for him. On the door beside the caneshop, a notice said: "No show today. Come back tomorrow." By the look of it, the notice was several days old. When Kathleen banged on the door, Mary, the landlady, answered and regarded her with a sour look.

"I have come to see Charlie," Kathleen said. "I'm a friend."

"Visit him quick," Mary said in a scornful tone. "He may not have much time left." She let Kathleen in and the hunchback found her way through dimly lit, stale-smelling rooms to Charlie's bedside.

He lay on a straw ticking mattress by a fire that burned low. Light from the glowing coals gave his face a ruddy color that did not match his feverish eyes and mournful expression. He was shivering despite the blankets that covered him. "Ah, Kathleen," he murmured. "Sit with me for a time. I am lonely now, very lonely."

Sometimes, he shivered and huddled closer to the fire; sometimes, he threw off all his blankets, suddenly drenched in sweat. He complained that his head ached constantly.

He was sick and delirious for three days, and she stayed with him, bringing him bread and cheese to eat, tucking the blankets close around his shoulders, holding his hand so that he would know he was not alone. On the seventh day, he came to himself again. Kathleen had fallen asleep on the floor beside his mattress, and she woke to see him watching her.

"Kathleen," he said. His eyes were sad, but the fever had left them. "What are you doing here?"

"Taking care of you, Charlie my lad."

"There's not much use to that now," he muttered. He shook his head weakly. "I've been foolish. I thought that the magic would be strong enough. But that's dead and gone. The world is changing."

"Don't say that, Charlie." Now that he was finally giving up his mad notions, it pained her to see it.

"I'll die here in London."

"No, Charlie," she said, "you'll get better soon." He just shook his head, recognizing the lie.

"Have you seen Joe Vance?" he asked.

Kathleen went out looking for Vance. After the darkened room, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

courtyard seemed brilliantly lit. She found Vance lounging in the gray light that passed for sunshine in London, practicing a game involving three shells and a pea. When she told him that Charlie wanted to see him, he reluctantly followed her into the room.

"You're looking bad," Vance said. "That doctor—John Hunter—came to see you again. Says he might be able to give you something for that fever, if he could see you. A swell gentleman, by the look of him."

Charlie shook his head. "I told you I will not see him."

"Been a week since any money came in," Vance said slowly. "And Mary will be looking for her rent, come Monday."

Charlie said nothing. He was watching the flames, ignoring Vance's words. When Vance stood up, as if preparing to go, he roused himself. "You got to help me, Joe," he said. "Can you tell me where I'd find an honest undertaker?"

Mr. Fields, undertaker and friend of Joe Vance, studied Charlie with an expert eye and decided that he wouldn't last long. His face was pale and wet with sweat; his eyes were bloodshot.

"You're interested in a coffin?" said Fields. "I'll have to build it special. That'll be extra."

"You must make arrangements for me," Charlie muttered weakly. He reached out and grasped Fields' hand. "Take my body back to Ireland. To my mother's farm. You must see to it. I'll pay."

"I've heard of Chinamen sending their bones home," the undertaker said, "but never an Irishman."

"Please," Charlie said hoarsely, squeezing the man's hand. "You must see to it." He fumbled in his bedclothes and pulled out a small pouch that clinked in his hand. Fields eyed it, assessing its contents. "You must take me home safe."

"For a price, anything can be arranged," Fields said heartily. "You can rest easy, Mr. Bryne."

Kathleen nursed Charlie as best she could. But when her money ran out, she had to return to her stall in the afternoons and evenings to earn money she needed to bring him food. She brought him bread and cheese and mutton stew, though he did not eat half of what she brought.

It rained that week, a dark sooty rain that turned the streets to mud. The costermongers went out late and came in early, with little profit to show for their efforts. The mud clung to the wheels of coaches and to the horses' hooves, and the hackney drivers cursed the weather. The men who carried sedan chairs got chilblains.

Early in the morning on the seventh day of rain, all the dogs of St. Giles Rookery congregated at the door to the canemaker's shop. The canemaker tried to drive them away with kicks and curses, but as often as he scattered them, they returned. He gave up at last and tried to ignore them, glancing out only occasionally to see the filthy mongrels sitting beneath his sign. Surprisingly, the dogs did not fight.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The cats came later, slinking over the rooftops. Despite the rain, they crouched above the canemaker's shop, glowering at the people in the street below. Strangely, the dogs did not bark at the cats and the cats did not yowl at the dogs. They waited quietly.

Early in the afternoon, a sparrow came to perch on the wooden sign that marked the canemaker's shop. For a time, it sat alone in the rain, its feathers fluffed against the cold. Then it was joined by another sparrow and a pair of finches. A little later, four mourning doves came to perch on the sign, not far from the cats. But the cats made no move to stalk them.

The canemaker looked up when a sound that was at once familiar and strange penetrated his consciousness, making its way past the rattle of coach wheels and the cursing of drivers. He paused, brush in hand. Still holding the cane that he had been varnishing, he went to the doorway, following the sound that called up memories of his boyhood in the country. Sitting on his sign, above the filthy street, a meadowlark was singing its heart out.

From the eaves, the mourning doves watched him with their bright black eyes. From the gutter, the dogs regarded him sadly. The canemaker looked up at the small, gold-flecked bird, then retreated into his shop.

Twilight settled over London. The light had a peculiarly gray tone, as if the city had sucked all color and life from the air. The proprietor of a pie shop was lighting an oil lamp to hang in the door of his establishment. Here and there, the yellow glow of burning lamps marked the shops and taverns that remained open.

Joe Vance emerged from the hallway beside the canemaker's shop, kicked his way through the crowd of waiting dogs, and made his way to the nearest tavern. Just inside the door he surveyed the smoky interior, then made his way to the corner table, where the undertaker waited with John Hunter.

"How fares the patient?" the undertaker asked jovially. He had been drinking gin, by the smell of it, and he was smiling, an expression that sat uncomfortably on his long face.

"Won't be long now," Vance said. "I took him a bottle of gin to ease the pain."

"And hurry him along," said Fields, chuckling. He grinned at John Hunter, but John glared back, not sharing the joke.

"I'd help him if I could," John muttered defensively.

"Certainly you would, Dr. Hunter," Vance said expansively. "We all would. Why, I care about the lad as if he were my own son. Isn't that so, Fields?"

John scowled and shook his head, believing none of it. "Let's get on to business," he said.

The undertaker nodded and spoke softly. "Now, we were discussing the price. Dr. Hunter had offered twenty pounds for the body."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Twenty pounds?" Vance scowled, forgetting his love for the giant at the mention of money. "Out of the question."

"It does seem inadequate for the unusual merchandise we have to offer," the undertaker murmured. "It seems to me that ten times that amount would be fair."

John Hunter looked up from his beer. "You'll find few takers for such merchandise."

"Ah, you would be surprised," said the undertaker. "My conversations with the head surgeon at St. George's Hospital suggest that there may be a number of takers."

"Thirty pounds," John said.

The bargaining was protracted. Vance spoke of his great affection for the giant so eloquently that his eyes became moist with tears. He was the giant's friend—perhaps his only friend—and he would never consider the doctor's offer were it not for his own need for capital. Persuaded by his own eloquence, he felt a brief pang of regret, but dismissed it as John raised the price.

Fields stressed the rarity of the commodity they offered. "Unique on the face of the earth," he said. "An opportunity like this comes along once in a lifetime—if you're lucky."

John was the least garrulous of the lot, protesting that the two of them had unrealistic notions of their merchandise's value. But clearly Vance and Fields had the advantage. Finally after much gin and talk, John settled at one hundred pounds and would not budge. They drank to seal the bargain.

The clock was striking eleven when Vance went to check on the giant. The street seemed unnaturally quiet. In the dim light of the tavern's lantern, Vance could see that the dogs were still waiting. He heard a rustle of feathers above his head. Suddenly, the lark sang, a sweet burst of glory, like a sudden ray of sunshine in a dark place. The largest of the mongrels tilted back his head and began to howl, and the rest joined in, wailing like banshees.

A man in a nightshirt flung open the window above Vance's head and shouted at the dogs, but the howling continued. The shouting was followed by a pail of water and then the contents of a chamberpot. Vance quickly ducked for the protection of the tavern doorway. Retreating inside, he said to Fields and John Hunter, "I suppose he's dead."

In the dark of night, with the help of Vance and Fields, John Hunter stripped the corpse of the dead giant, slipped a sack over the body, and loaded the sack into his coach. In his haste to be off, he overlooked the giant's staff, which was propped in the corner by the fire.

The pack of mongrels that hung about the door followed the coach for half a mile or so, but he lost them after that. At Earl's Court, the coachman, who had grown used to nocturnal errands, helped him load the body into a barrow and transport it to the basement workshop.

Alone with the cadaver, John hesitated. "So Charlie," he muttered,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You came to me after all, whether you would or not. I feel half sorry for you, but I suppose you died happy enough." He shook his head, thinking of the giant's superstition and ignorance. Then he wielded his sharp knife and prepared Charlie's bones for the boiling pot.

It was nearly dawn when he became aware that the caged lark in the next room was singing its heart out. He cocked his head to listen, wondering what had prompted the bird to sing. In the months that he had kept it in confinement beneath the earth, the lark had never to his knowledge sung a note.

Putting the last bone in the pot, John went to investigate, but the bird fell silent at his approach and never sang again.

Charlie was gone when Kathleen returned from Covent Garden that night. His room was dark and the fire had burned out. His clothing was scattered about the straw ticking mattress, and she guessed at what had happened.

When she found his staff by the fireside, its blossoms wilted and dry, she knew he was dead. He never would have left without it. She took the staff with her when she left. It had a nice feel in her hand and it reminded her of Charlie.

It was strange, but her hump never ached when she held the staff in her hand. Free of the pain, she drank less gin. After a time, it seemed to her that her hump was beginning to shrink. And then she was sure of it: the twist in her back grew straighter every day.

Her livelihood shrank with her hump—no one would pay for a fortune from a straight-backed Irishwoman. She lost business to the fortune teller on the other side of the garden, a darkskinned man who wore multi-colored scarves and stared into a crystal to see the future. Finally, with the last of her earnings, Kathleen returned to Ireland. There was no reason to stay in London, and the staff in her hand gave her the urge to wander. She went to Ireland and wandered the winding roads, telling stories in return for a bit of food and a place to sleep. Sometimes, she told stories of London. Sometimes, she talked about a giant named Charlie, and in her tales he grew to nearly the size of Bran the Blessed. It was not a bad life.

A month of wandering and she found herself in County Derry. Enquiring here and there, she found her way to the wild pastureland known as the Giant's Boneyard. There she leaned the staff against the largest boulder and stood for a time, looking out over the valley and thinking of Charlie. At last, she decided to walk back to the village and look for a friendly home where she might sleep—but when she went to pick up the staff she found that it had taken root. White blossoms sprouted from the dry wood, and new green shoots reached for the gray sky. She left it there, where it belonged. She had had it long enough.

Eventually, Kathleen married a farmer. As a farmer's wife, she took care of the land. It was a hard life, but one for which she was well-suited, with her strong back and willing ways.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

John Hunter examined Charlie Bryne's skeleton carefully, but the doctor died without learning why Charlie grew so large. More than one hundred years after John's death, a surgeon named Harvey Williams Cushing examined Charlie's skull and noticed a deformity in the bone that had covered the pituitary gland. This observation ultimately led to Cushing's discovery that the pituitary plays a role in controlling human growth, one more small piece in the great puzzle that John Hunter was trying to solve.

Cushing did not explain why birds often congregated at the window of the room in which the giant's bones hung. The sill was thick with their droppings. Sometimes, they would rattle on the glass with their beaks and flap their wings impatiently, as if demanding to be let in.

Perhaps Cushing did not notice them. Like Hunter, he was preoccupied with understanding what made the human body tick. He had no time for the foolishness of birds, the poetry of cloud formations, the illegible scrawls left by snails crawling across the slate paving stones in the garden.

That's the truth, as near as I can tell it. Oh, historians may quibble with some events I have described. I can find no historical documentation detailing the flowers that grew on Charlie's staff or mentioning the staff at all, for that matter. And perhaps the birds did not really gather at the window to pay court to Charlie's bones. I can find no records that say they did—but then, I can find no denial of it either. Surely these are minor points. At its heart, the tale is true.

Charlie Bryne is dead and gone and his bones still hang in London's Royal College of Surgeons. In the Giant's Boneyard, songbirds nest in the hawthorn thicket that has grown up near the boulder that old people call the Giant's Skull. In this lonely spot, there lingers a sense of sadness and loss. Sometimes, a foolish traveler, heading home late at night, will feel a sudden chill as he passes the field. When the chill touches him, he'll clutch his coat around him, glance back over his shoulder like a man pursued by ghosts, and hurry home to the safety of electric lighting, content to live in a world where ghosts do not walk and bones rest easy. ●

NEAT STUFF

(Continued from page 16)

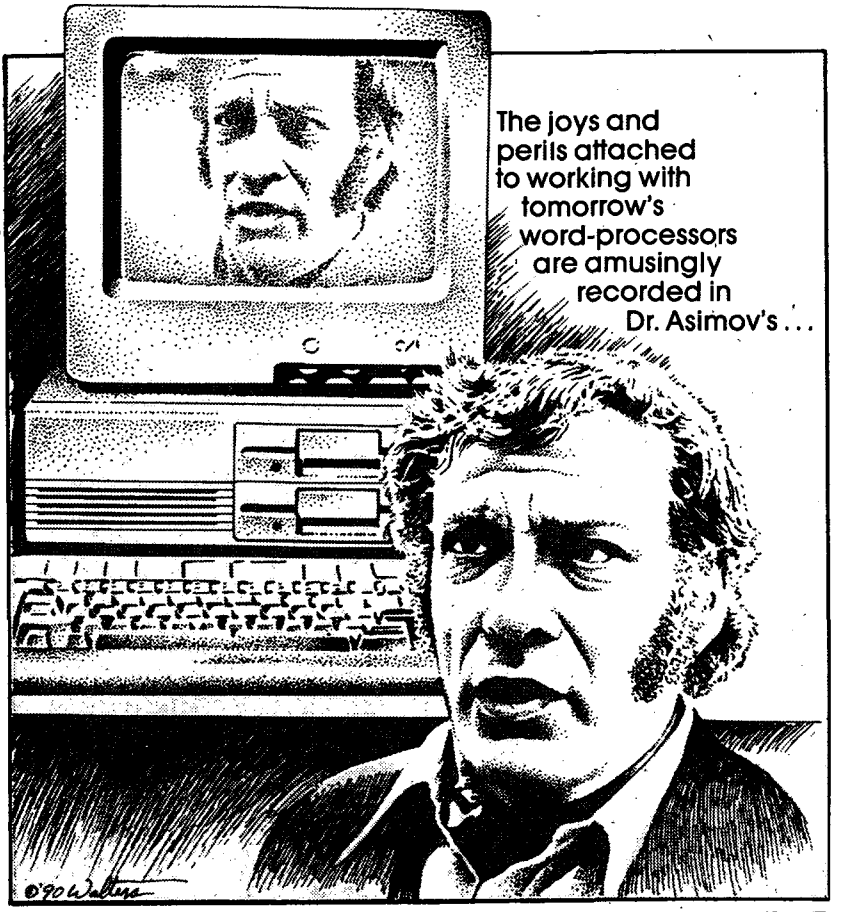
and comment on items on the bulletin board. Stephen Birnbaum covers travel and Gene Siskel supplies movie reviews.

Unlike other services, Prodigy is graphics oriented. Instructions in the manual and on the screen are simple, and there are bright colorful images to accompany stories and games. There are also ads, a steady stream on the lower part of the screen. You can type *Look* and check out an advertiser and then type *Zip* to return to whatever you were doing.

Prodigy is a flat $9.95 a month, its price kept low by the ads and

(Continued on page 93)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


art: Bob Walters
The joys and perils attached to working with tomorrow's word-processors are amusingly recorded in Dr. Asimov's . . .
©'90 Walters

FAULT-INTOLERANT

by Isaac Asimov

9 January

I, Abram Ivanov, finally have a home computer; a word processor, to be exact. I fought it as long as I could. I argued it out with myself. I am America's most prolific writer and I do fine on a typewriter. Last year I published over thirty books. Some of them were small books for kids. Some were anthologies. But there were also novels, short story collections, essay collections, non-fiction books. Nothing to be ashamed of.

So why do I need a word-processor? I can't go any faster. But, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know, there's such a thing as neatness. Typing my stuff means I have to introduce pen-and-ink items to correct typos, and nobody does that anymore. I don't want my manuscripts to stick out like a sore thumb. I don't want editors to think my stuff is second rate, just because it is corrected.

The difficulty was finding a machine that wouldn't take two years to learn to use. Deft, I'm not—as I've frequently mentioned in this diary. And I want one that doesn't break down every other day. Mechanical failures just throw me. So I got one that's "fault-tolerant." That means if some component goes wrong, the machine keeps right on working, tests the malfunctioning component, corrects it if it can, reports it if it can't, and replacements can be carried through by anybody. It doesn't take an expert hacker. Sounds like my kind of thing.

5 February

I haven't been mentioning my word-processor lately, because I've been struggling to learn how it works. I've managed. For a while, I had a lot of trouble, because although I have a high IQ, it's a very specialized high IQ. I can write, but coping with mechanical objects throws me.

But I learned quickly, once I gained sufficient confidence. What did it was this. The manufacturer's representative assured me that the machine would develop flaws only rarely, and would be unable to correct its own flaws only *exceedingly* rarely. He said I wouldn't be likely to need a new component oftener than once in five years.

And if I did need one, they would hear exactly what was needed from the machine. The computer would then replace the part itself, do all the wiring and oiling that was necessary and reject the old part, which I could then throw away.

That's sort of exciting. I almost wish something would go wrong so that I could get a new part and insert it. I could tell everyone, "Oh, sure, the discombobulator blew a fuse, and I fixed it like a shot. Nothing to it."—But they wouldn't believe me.

I'm going to try writing a short story on it. Nothing too long. Just about two thousand words, maybe. If I get confused, I can always go back to the typewriter until I've regained my confidence. Then I can try again.

14 February

I didn't get confused. Now that the proof is in, I can talk about it. The short story went as smoothly as cream. I brought it in and they've taken it. No problem.

So I've finally started my new novel. I should have started it a month ago, but I had to make sure I could work my word processor first. Let's hope it works. It'll seem funny not having a pile of yellow sheets I can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rifle through when I want to check something I said a hundred pages earlier, but I suppose I can learn how to check back on the discs.

19 February

The computer has a spelling correction component. That caught me by surprise because the representative hadn't told me about it. At first, it let misspellings go and I just proofread each page as I turned it out. But then it began to mark off any word it was unfamiliar with, which was a little bothersome because my vocabulary is a large one and I have no objection to making up words. And, of course, any proper name I use is something it was unfamiliar with.

I called the representative because it was annoying to have to be notified of all sorts of corrections that didn't really have to be made.

The representative said, "Don't let that bother you, Mr. Ivanov. If it questions a word that you want to remain as it is, just retype it exactly as it is and the computer will get the idea and not correct it the next time."

That puzzled me. "Don't I have to set up a dictionary for the machine? How will it know what's right and what's wrong?"

"That's part of the fault-tolerance, Mr. Ivanov," he said. "The machine already has a basic dictionary and it picks up new words as you use them. You will find that it will pick up false misspellings to a smaller and smaller degree. To tell you truthfully, Mr. Ivanov, you have a late-model there and we're not sure we know all its potentialities. Some of our researchers consider it fault-tolerant in that it can continue to work despite its own flaws, but fault-intolerant in that it won't stand for flaws in those who use it. Please report to us if there's anything puzzling. We would really like to know."

I'm not sure I'll like this.

7 March

Well, I've been struggling with the word processor and I don't know what to think. For a long time, it would mark off misspellings, and I would retype them correctly. And it certainly learned how to tell *real* misspellings. I had no trouble there. In fact, when I had a long word, I would sometimes throw in a wrong letter just to see if it would catch it. I would write "supercede" or "vaccum" or "Skenectady." It almost never failed.

And then yesterday a funny thing happened. It stopped waiting for me to retype the wrong spelling. It retyped it automatically itself. You can't help striking the wrong key sometimes so I would write "5he" instead of "the" and the "5" would change to "t" in front of my eyes. And it would happen quickly, too.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I tested it by deliberately typing a word with a wrong letter. I would see it show up wrong on the screen. I would blink my eyes and it would be right.

This morning I phoned the representative.

"Hmm," he said, "Interesting."

"Troublesome," I said, "it might introduce mistakes. If I type 'blww' does the machine correct it to 'blew' or to 'blow?' Or what if it *thinks* I mean 'blue,' 'ue' when I *really* mean 'blew,' 'ew.' See what I mean?"

He said, "I have discussed your machine with one of our theoretical experts. He tells me it may be capable of absorbing internal clues from your writing and knows which word you really want to use. As you type into it, it begins to understand your style and integrate it into its own programming."

A little scary, but it's convenient. I don't have to proofread the pages now.

20 March

I *really* don't have to proofread the pages. The machine has taken to correcting my punctuation and word order.

The first time it happened, I couldn't believe it. I thought I had had a small attack of dizziness and had imagined I had typed something that wasn't really on the screen.

It happened oftener and oftener and there was no mistake about it. It got to the point where I *couldn't* make a mistake in grammar. If I tried to type something like "Jack, and Jill went up the hill," that comma simply wouldn't appear. No matter how I tried to type "I has a book," it always shows up as "I have a book." Or if I wrote, "Jack, and Jill as well, went up the hill," then I couldn't omit the commas. They'd go in of their own accord.

It's a lucky thing I keep this diary in longhand or I couldn't explain what I mean. I couldn't give an example of wrong English.

I don't really like to have a computer arguing with me over English, but the worst part of it is that it's always right.

Well, look, I don't throw a fit when a human copy editor sends me back a manuscript with corrections in every line. I'm just a writer, I'm not an expert on the minutiae of English. Let the copy editors copy edit, they still can't *write*. And so let the word-processor copy edit. It takes a load off me.

17 April

I spoke too soon in the last item in which I mentioned my word-processor. For three weeks, it copy edited me and my novel went along

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smoothly. It was a good working arrangement. I did the creating and it did the modulating, so to speak.

Then yesterday evening, it refused to work at all. Nothing happened, no matter what keys were touched. It was plugged in all right; the wall-switch was on; I was doing everything correctly. It just wouldn't work. Well I thought, so much for that business about "Not once in five years." I'd only been using it for three and a half months and already so many parts were out that it wouldn't work.

That meant that new parts ought to come from the factory by special messenger, but not till the next day, of course. I felt terrible, you can bet, and I dreaded having to go back to the typewriter, searching out all my own mistakes and then having to make pen-and-ink corrections or to retype the page.

I went to bed in a foul humor, and didn't actually sleep much. First thing in the morning, or, anyway, after breakfast, I went into my office, and just as I walked up to the word processor, as though it could read my mind and tell that I was so annoyed I would cheerfully have kicked it off the desk and out the window—it started working.

All by itself, mind you. I never touched the keys. The words appeared on the screen a lot more quickly than I could have made them appear and it began with:

FAULT-INTOLERANT

by Abram Ivanov

I simply stared. It went on to write my diary items concerning itself, as I have done above, but *much better*. The writing was smoother, more colorful, with a successful touch of humor. In fifteen minutes, it was done, and in five minutes the printer had placed it on sheets.

That apparently had just been for exercise, or for practice, for once that was done, the last page I had written of my novel appeared on the screen, and then the words began to proceed without me.

The word-processor had clearly learned to write my stuff, just as I would have written it, only better.

Great! No more work. The word-processor wrote it under my name and wrote with my style, given a certain amount of improvement. I could just let it go, pick up the surprised reviews from my critics telling the world how I had improved, and watch the royalties pour in.

That's all right as far as it goes, but I'm not America's most prolific writer for no reason. I happen to *love* to write. That happens to be all that I want to do.

Now if my word-processor does my writing, what do *I* do with the rest of my life? ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE

James Patrick Kelly returns to these pages next month with a big new novella, our wild and pyrotechnic June cover story, "Mr. Boy." F. Scott Fitzgerald told us long ago that the rich were not like you and me, but he probably never dreamed just *how* unlike us they could eventually become. Kelly's Mr. Boy is a "teenager" living in an ultra-rich, ultra-decadent community in a strange future Connecticut, but even for those circles, he's a bit unusual: among other things, he's immortal, he's heavily into Corpse Porn, his best friends are a dinosaur named Stennie and an icily logical artifical person named Comrade, and he lives *inside* his mother, who has had herself reshaped into a hundred-foot-tall replica of the Statue of Liberty. Life is luxurious but dull for Mr. Boy, but when he blunders across some information he shouldn't possess, things get more exciting than he bargained for, and he finds that he has to change his ways—or die. Wildly inventive, told with headlong panache and bizarre *élan,* "Mr. Boy" is sure to be one of the year's most talked-about stories; don't miss it. Nebula-and-Hugo winner **Larry Niven** is also on hand for June, returning to these pages after too long an absence with a suspenseful look at a high-tech conspiracy that must spread itself unnoticed across the solar system if the human race itself is to have any chance to survive, in a taut and hard-edged explanation of how even "Madness Has Its Place."

ALSO IN JUNE: Hugo-and-World Fantasy Award winner **Avram Davidson** takes us to a vividly realized, richly imagined Central America country where strange things can—and do—happen and magic is never very far away, and introduces us to the strange adventures of Jack Limekiller, in the evocative "Limekiller At Large"; from the lush depths of the jungle, **Geoffrey A. Landis** then takes us to near-future Boston for a wry look at a group of MIT students who may be too smart for their own good, and examines a few of their very bizarre "Projects"; **Lewis Shiner** returns after a long absence with an elegant and thought-provoking look at what a certain eccentric nineteenth-century inventor *might* have been able to accomplish if he'd had the chance, in "White City"; National Book Award-winner **Lisa Goldstein** returns with a bittersweet study of the ethical problems a woman encounters in deciding how to use "The Blue Love Potion"; and new writer **Mary Rosenblum** makes her *IAsfm* debut with a fast-paced story of a modern-day encounter with very Ancient magic, and a bitter young man who finds that revenge *can* be had, but "For A Price." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our June issue on sale on your newsstands on May 1,1990.

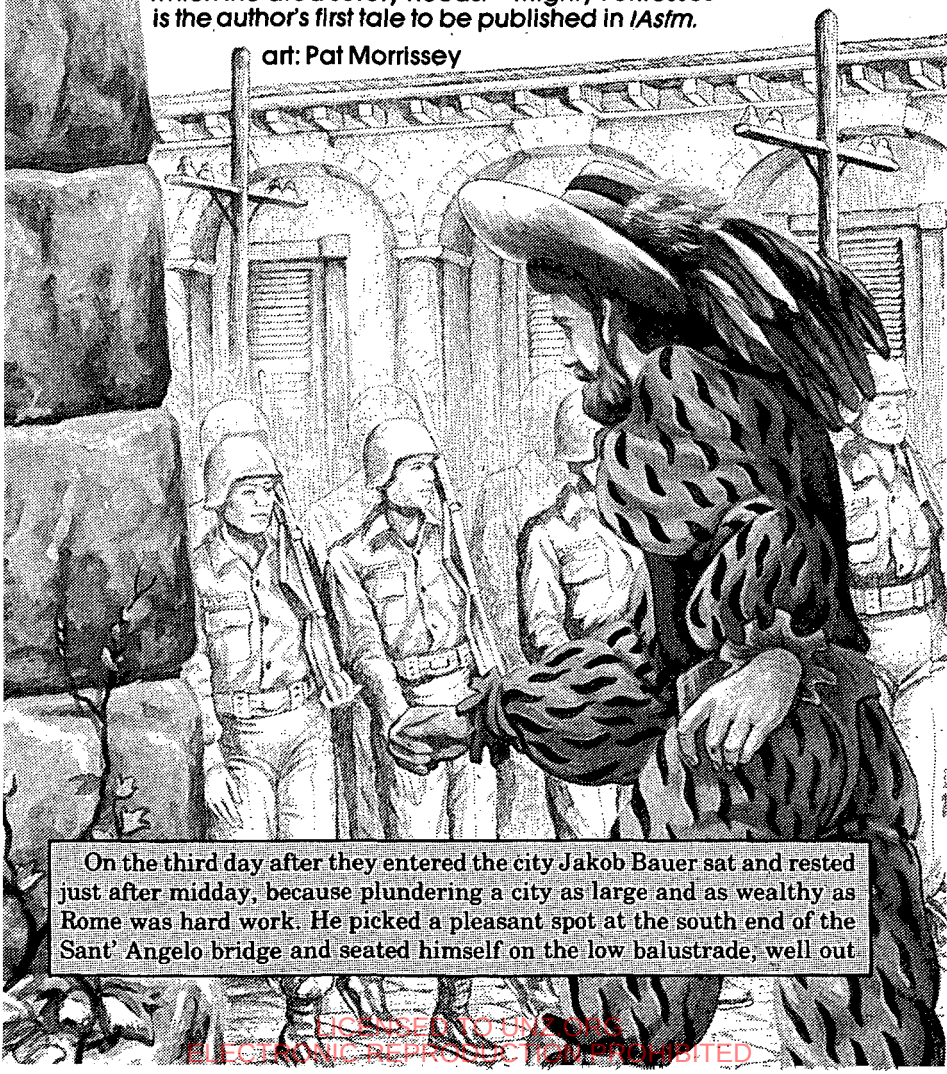
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MIGHTY FORTRESSES

by John Maddox Roberts

Nineteen of John Maddox Roberts' books have appeared in print and threemore are finished and awaiting publication. His latest novel, *Enigma Variations*, is forthcoming from Ace Books. The author tells us that he and his wife live in southwest Virginia, high in the Appalachians. They are "at present founding a local library, which the area sorely needs." "Mighty Fortresses" is the author's first tale to be published in *IAsfm.*

art: Pat Morrissey



On the third day after they entered the city Jakob Bauer sat and rested just after midday, because plundering a city as large and as wealthy as Rome was hard work. He picked a pleasant spot at the south end of the Sant' Angelo bridge and seated himself on the low balustrade, well out

LICENSED TO UNSONS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of shot range from the castle at the north end. Little chance of a stray quarrel or harquebus ball, though. What was going on there today was parley, not battle. A knot of Imperial officers clad in glittering armor stood in their stirrups and shouted up at a similar knot of Papal captains above the portcullis.

Here the air was clear and sweet, free of the smoke from the many houses and churches merrily burning all over the city. Beneath the bridge flowed the Tiber, upon whose broad surface mallards paddled tranquilly among corpses. From both sides of the river came the sounds of crackling flames, crashing timbers, and breaking glass, mingled with the occasional shot or scream. Otherwise, it was a beautiful day.

Jakob was thirty-one years old, golden-bearded and built much like a beer barrel, a prize he had sought without success all day. From his bonnet with its dozen peacock feathers each half a yard in length to his bear-pawed shoes of scarlet leather, he was a colorful figure, dressed according to the aesthetic of the German *Landsknecht.* His sleeves were tremendous bags of purple silk, covered with innumerable tiny slashes through which the lime-green lining showed. His tight blue jerkin was streaked with rust from his now-discarded breastplate. His baggy trunk-hose were tied at the knees with gold ribbon, the left leg orange, slashed diagonally to show off the black lining, the right slashed vertically to expose white satin. His left stocking was pink, the right one latitudinally striped in six slightly faded colors. His grapefruit-sized codpiece was of maroon brocade and contained, besides the future of the Bauer family, two hundred ninety-seven pearls snipped from a chasuble formerly owned by Cardinal Armellini who now huddled in the castle, along with the Pope.

Other soldiers came and went on the bridge, carrying their loot to the camps, then going back for more. Many bore great wealth, although the more provident carried food and other provision as well, for the peasants were understandably reluctant to bring their produce to market. Famine would arrive all too soon, to join his fellow Horsemen.

"Bauer!" Jakob looked up and saw his companion, Hans Helmschmied. The two had split up in the exuberant chaos of the first day of the sack. Hans was a tall, lean man who favored clothing of gray and orange. He carried a two-hand sword sloped over his shoulder, and a shorter *katz-balger* angling from his belt. Walking next to him was an aged little man, his skinny shanks clad in wrinkled blue hose, his body covered from shoulder to knee in a countryman's dingy brown smock. His pale, fine-boned face and delicate hands did not match the peasant clothes.

"Good day, Hans! Is Italy not an agreeable place to campaign?" He squinted up through the thin smoke to the white clouds, fluffy as the silken featherbeds they had looted from prelates' houses, the cheerful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sunlight gleaming down between them like the glory of the Holy Spirit in the stained-glass windows. "I have never seen days of such beauty, and were it not for the paucity of any beer worthy of the name, I would be most content with this war."

Hans leaned his great sword next to Jakob's harquebus, at the pedestal of the statue of some long-dead heathen. "Yes, there is nothing to drink here but wine. However, it is uncommonly good wine. Considering who it used to belong to, it ought to be." He boosted himself to the balustrade and sat next to Jakob, doffing his bonnet, with its ninety-five feathers, ranging from goose quills to ostrich plumes, one for each of Luther's theses. His hair was neatly bagged in a fine-meshed snood. He brushed a few specks of dandruff from the bishop's-mantle of silvered mail that covered his shoulders. It reached almost to his elbows, dagged at its lower hem and tastefully edged in brass.

"Who is your friend?" Jakob took cups from the bag next to him while Hans unslung a weighty skin of wine.

"My name is Niccolo, sir. Your friend was kind enough to escort me here. I was fearful of the drunken soldiery, although as anyone can see I am not threatening and have nothing worth stealing." The man had an engagingly vulpine face, with a wicked smile. His eyes, though, were deep-sunken, his hands clawlike on his walking stick. He was clearly not long for this world.

"In return for which," Hans said, "he led me to a town house kept by Cardinal Passerini for his Genoese mistress. The Spaniards had already been there, though. Nothing worth taking except this excellent wine, which an Andalusian was bringing up from the basement just as we walked in."

"God rest his soul," said Niccolo.

"Amen. In any case, this fellow acted in good faith, so I brought him here."

"You did wisely in hiring an escort," Jakob said. He passed fine chalices to the other two men, retaining for himself a golden ciborium, its lip worked with Byzantine gems. "A man who looks like an official or merchant, yet who dresses like a peasant, is apt to find himself being questioned, a tedious process which few survive save by revealing where their wealth is hid."

Niccolo smiled, a slight quirking of his near-invisible lips. "You flatter me. I dress this way because it is all I can afford. I have been out of favor with the Florentine Signoria for many years. I am a mere scribbler of plays and essays, the most despised of men."

"Why did you wish to come here?" Jakob wanted to know, holding out his cup while Hans poured.

Niccolo surveyed the scene, seemingly with satisfaction. "My master,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Francesco Guicciardini, asked me to travel hither and send him a report on the condition of the city. Needing the employment, and having few days left to me at any rate, I came. This is a good place from which to view the end of the world."

Jakob drank, then caught a louse in his beard and cracked it between his nails. "Guicciardini? I think I have heard that name. Is he not a commander of the Papal forces? Then you are a spy." He looked at Hans. "Isn't there some rule against that?"

"None I ever heard." Hans shrugged, something else bothering him. "What do you mean, end of the world? No trumpets have sounded in the sky, no stars fallen into the sea. The oceans have not turned to blood."

"It is not that world of which I speak. The world has ended many times before. What dies here is a world of men dominated by priests and churches, by outdated concepts of knightly honor and chivalry, vaunting princelings proud as Lucifer on their cowpasture estates. They have been expiring for more than two centuries. What you hear about you is their death-rattle."

Hans nodded. "Our pastor has told us of this. Martin Luther says that it is time for us to overthrow these priests who sleep in Rome between silken sheets, worshipping golden idols, peddling remission of sins and other such abominations."

"I especially like the part about not tithing to the Vatican," Jakob added.

Niccolo snickered. "Do you truly think you fight a war of religion? What of your Spanish allies? They are not Lutheran."

Hans spat into the Tiber, narrowly missing a headless body in Farnese livery. "The Spaniards take arms against their Pope first because he is evil and corrupt, and second because they are men without faith or honor."

Niccolo waved a hand impatiently. "Faith and honor have no part in these doings. You have been fighting not over matters of religion, but over who will control Italy; the King of France or the Holy Roman Emperor, Francis or Charles, Valois or Habsburg. The Pope in there," he pointed an arthritic finger at the castle, "is not the shepherd of the faithful, but a *Medici!* Can you not see, this is not a matter of religion, but of *politics!*"

Jakob pondered for a while. "Never heard the word. However, it has turned out most profitably for us. We never dreamed that a country so wealthy could be so lacking in valor."

Niccolo sipped at his wine, and from his expression it tasted of gall and wormwood. "You northern barbarians have come down from the Alps and trampled my land to fragments and ashes, but I do not hold you to blame. We brought this upon ourselves, through our greed and short-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sightedness, our insularity and timidity. You foreigners retain a manliness which we have lost."

Jakob nodded somberly. "Yes, it is true that we are better men. Still, you have not utterly lacked for skilled warriors. Who was that man we killed at Governolo last winter? The leader of the Black Bands? He died very well."

"That man could almost have been a German," Hans said.

Niccolo's malicious smile was back. "Giovanni Delle Bande Nere, another fool who died for honor. No matter. The wheel of Fortuna has plunged my country low, but it shall be raised up again. It has happened before. Observe this bridge upon which we take our ease." He slapped the balustrade. "And that castle, where your leaders cast their ultimatum." He pointed to the strange, drumlike keep. "This bridge was built by Hadrian, and that castle was once his tomb."

"We know about Hadrian," Jakob said. "That was the rogue who condemned Martin Luther as a heretic." He studied the castle dubiously. "It looks older than that."

Niccolo shook his head in amused vexation. "You think of Pope Adrian, sixth of that name. He died unlamented but four years ago. No, these were the bridge and tomb of the Emperor Hadrian, of the *real* Roman Empire. All these princelings and prelates together could not match his might and glory. Every one of them claims land that once was his, and which he governed well, where they do nothing but bungle and feud."

The *Landsknechts* seemed interested. "How many pikes did he command?" Hans asked.

"Fewer than you would think. They stayed on the borders, because the empire was at peace within. And they were not pikemen, but like those Spaniards over there." He nodded towards a group of Bourbon's soldiers, grim sword-and-buckler fighters in steel caps and leather jerkins. They glared at the Germans and the Italian with undisguised hate. They dragged an enormous hanging stuffed with plate, jewelry, and precious fabrics. They had expected the Pope and the Curia to call down thunderbolts upon them for challenging Rome. It had not happened, and now they determined to make Rome pay for shaking their faith.

"I tried to convince the Florentine Signoria to raise a militia of citizens and arm them with sword and buckler like the old Romans. They preferred to hire foreigners." He shrugged. "Perhaps it was a mistake to look to the past for a cure to present problems. Our present is lost. I hope that I may have helped to shape the future."

Jakob was about to ask him what he meant but was distracted by the clop of approaching hooves. It was Julius Reinhardt, the regimental firemaster. He wore half-armor and a bemused expression. Over his shoulder he bore his torch, a badge of office since it was now extinguished. His

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was the duty of making sure the harquebusiers and cannoneers had fire for their matches, that campfires could be kindled when the regiment bivouacked, that there was flame for incendiary purposes when a town was to be torched. Just now there was no shortage of fire, so his services were not in demand.

"Join us, Julius," Hans called. The firemaster was from his home village, Elsterwerda. Jakob rummaged in his sack and came up with a fine silver goblet of no apparent ecclesiastical significance. The horse, a ponderous Flanders mare, clumped to a halt and stood stolidly while its rider accepted the brimming cup. He drained it and wiped with the back of his hand the long, white moustaches that framed his mouth. Droplets still clung to its tips, nonetheless.

"You look troubled," Hans said.

"I have beheld some disturbing sights," said the firemaster.

"That is to be expected," Jakob said. "A city being sacked is not like one in normal times. From the loot we've gathered here, this one has not been plundered in quite some time."

Julius blew through his moustache, making it flutter. "I was fighting wars while you were still nestled in your father's codpiece, Jakob. Everything that can happen in a fallen city I have seen. This is something of a far different nature, and I think something not of the natural world."

The others goggled at him. Hans hitched up on one buttock and farted loudly to drive off the devil. "What makes you say such a thing?" he asked. "You are no priest-besotted boy to see demons in the smoke of a burning church."

Reinhardt shook his head. "These things are not the antic creatures we see carved on cathedrals, and most are not uncanny creatures at all, but men like us, only . . ." he gestured with his free hand, seeking to break through this unaccustomed inarticulacy. "I have not words. If you would see, you must come with me."

Jakob looked at Hans. "I am ready for an adventure. Looting grows dull after the second day. Hans?"

The other *Landsknecht* buried his face in his chalice, then came up for air. "I am game. This will be a good time to see whether good Lutheran faith is proof against Papal devils. What of you, Messer Niccolo? Will you go with us?"

The little man smiled his sardonic best. "And why not? I come to the close of a miserable life. What better employment than to chase after demons in a fallen Rome? Lead on, you may need an interpreter if these imps speak only Latin."

They finished their wine and Jakob hopped from the balustrade and picked up his harquebus, shot pouch, and powder flask. "Tell me, Messer Niccolo, we have seen this bridge and yonder castle, we have seen the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

great ruins and marveled at the Colosseum, occupied though it is by scummy beggars." He resumed his feathered bonnet. "What made them stop being Romans and become instead, of all things, Italians?"

Niccolo could not answer him as they left the bridge. They followed the broad haunches of the Flanders mare as Julius led them south, deep into the city. Streets were clogged at intervals by rubble where houses had fallen due to fires or the overeagerness of looters. The entire contents of houses had been dumped from windows and doors into the streets, for better sorting in good light. Paneling, plaster, and wainscoting had been torn loose in the search for valuables and dumped likewise into the streets. Occasionally, looters had taken their axes to structural members and brought the houses crashing down on their heads. The soldiers and the Roman poor now scavenged among the piles for firewood.

"It was near here someplace," Julius muttered in his moustache. "Yes, here." The mare turned down a narrow street that wound among overhanging tenements. It seemed that this area was too poor to bother with, for the narrow street was clear, and none of the doors or windows appeared to have been forced. The tall buildings on either side shut out most of the light, leaving them groping near-blind after the bright sunlight in the open places.

The street, little more than an alley now, took several more turns, then widened slightly. More light came in from overhead and from above. There was a different feel to this place, as if the light or air were somehow altered.

"This place smells like an alchemist's den," Niccolo said. The mare's hoof rang loudly on something and they stopped to see what it was. Set into the street was a circular plate of thick steel. On its surface were four large letters.

"It looks like a well cover," Hans said. "But why put a well in a street? What do these letters signify, Messer Niccolo?"

"S.P.Q.R. It is how the ancient Romans marked their coins and public works. It means 'the senate and people of Rome.' I suppose it could be part of the ancient sewer system, although how a slab of iron like this has survived more than a thousand years I cannot imagine."

"Look at this," Bauer called. The others joined him. He stood before a shop. Not only had it escaped looting, but its front was a single pane of glass as wide as a man's extended arms. The glass was somewhat grimy but otherwise as clear as air, with no ripples or lumps. None of them had ever seen a piece of glass so large. Instead of a shop sign, the word "Coltelleria" was written in Roman capitals *on the glass*. Within, a display of edged ware rested on dark cloth. Most of the items were familiar: kitchen knives, razors, daggers, and peasant knives, scissors and a few surgeon's tools. There were strange implements as well: small

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

folding knives, some with a great number of blades and tiny tools, others made like stilettos, with buttons on the handles. They marveled at the glass for a while, then Jakob smashed it with the butt of his harquebus.

"I need a new knife," he said, reaching inside. "Broke my old one on a pikeman's gorget." He took a single-edged peasant knife, handsomely hilted in staghorn. He checked the base of the blade for a maker's mark, found instead yet more lettering. Jakob could read passably well, but the Roman-style letters meant nothing to him. "Can you read this?" he asked Niccolo.

The Italian studied the blade, his face like that of a man who lives in a dream. "It says 'C. Hertz', then, below that, 'Solingen.' I've no idea what it means."

"Solingen?" Jakob slapped the S-hilted sword at his side. "That's where my *katzbalger* was made. They make the finest blades in the world there. I wonder when they started using words instead of maker's marks?"

Reinhardt urged them on. "There's a *platz* up ahead. There you'll see."

They resumed their trek, the mare clop-clopping before them until the alley ended abruptly at the head of a stone stairway. They went no farther because the stairway led down to a large piazza full of people. The people below them were so densely packed that it was difficult to make out details, save that they were dressed strangely, in clothes that were neither tight nor baggy. Their attention was directed toward a balcony on the façade of a palace facing the piazza. Between piazza and palace lay a street, kept clear by wooden barricades.

"What is such a throng doing here?" Hans wondered. "Do they seek refuge from the sack? How have we missed this place?"

"Watch," Reinhardt said.

They watched. The piazza, with its central fountain and the surrounding buildings, looked much like others they had seen in the city, save for some odd details. Down the center of the cleared street ran two gleaming, parallel rails of steel, an odd sight indeed. Above everything, at the level of the second stories of the buildings, hung a messy network of black ropes, strung on poles or from the façades of the buildings.

"Now!" Reinhardt said. There was some activity on the balcony as men came out and milled about, arranging themselves in some sort of order. The wall behind the balcony was covered with banners and stone eagles spread their wings from the cornerposts.

"Those are Imperial Roman eagles," Niccolo mused, "and look, that banner bears the *fasces,* the symbol of consular authority."

Now a man strode forth onto the balcony and the populace broke into frenzied cheering and chanting. He was a burly man, shaven-headed, wearing a hat like a Turkish fez. He stood imperiously, his massive chin raised and thrust forward like the ram of a galley.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They are hailing him as their leader," Niccolo said. His old, sunken eyes glowed.

Now another man came onto the balcony, smaller, not as imposing as the first. He wore a coat with long sleeves and a saucer-shaped hat and was beardless, with only a perfunctory moustache beneath his nose. With the bald man, he returned the crowd's straight-armed salute.

"Watch now!" Julius said.

From somewhere they heard a rhythmic tramping and the sound of drums, pipes, and horns. Their jaws fell open as neat lines of men came into view, marching in step, each wearing clothes identical to all the others. Everything they wore was black, including their bowl-shaped helmets. Each man shouldered an odd, attenuated harquebus.

"Whose army is this?" Jakob demanded. "We hold the city and no armies of the League are anywhere near. And what kind of soldiers are these, with all dressed alike?"

"Only *Landsknecht* march like that," Hans said, "all in step. Georg von Frundsberg taught us that, a great soldier and a good Lutheran. Where are their pikes and halberds? Surely they cannot all be harquebusiers."

Now another band came marching through, these in gray attire, with helmets that resembled the sallets of the previous century. At their front marched a man who carried a silly little sword, like a child's toy. With this he smartly saluted the group on the balcony. He turned his head and barked an order to the men behind him. They snapped their heads around to face the balcony as they passed.

"That man speaks like a Swabian," Hans observed.

"This is what I saw this morning," Julius said. "The same crowd, the same men on the balcony, the same parade of soldiers, all harquebusiers with not a breastplate or a scrap of mail among them."

"What devil's work is this?" Jakob demanded. He reached for the crucifix around his neck, only to remember that he no longer wore it.

"Not devil's work," Niccolo said. "You men still live in a world of primitive superstition, you must have the meddling of God or of demons to explain things. This is Rome! An ancient city, for century upon century the focus of power, of prayer, of the awe and wonder of the whole world. Her very stones vibrate with history! In times like these, when a world is ending and another being born, men are vouchsafed visions, and where better than in Rome? She displays for us some of her glories."

Jakob took a pull at the wineskin, his brows knit. "You mean what we see is not real? Are we seeing one of those old Caesars of yours? I'm no scholar, but I know that even in my grandfather's day there were no harquebuses."

"Not the past," Niccolo hissed, "but the future! Look at that balcony.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Where are the priests and bishops and cardinals to bless the troops, calculating their share of the loot all the while? At the end of my life, Italia shows me that all my work has not been in vain! Men will heed my writings, and throw off the false accretions of fifteen centuries. These are princes who rule with the good of the state as their only concern, and answerable only to their sovereign selves, not to God or god's ministers, not to some toadying poet's vision of the duties of the prince to the poor and weak. Such ideas have brought us to obscurity and ruin!"

"I like their boots," Hans said. "They make a pleasing sound when they march."

Niccolo went on, oblivious. "Look at those soldiers. Those aren't loot-hungry mercenaries. Those are citizen soldiers like the legions of old, and look at their faces, those men worship the lords on the balcony."

Jakob shifted uncomfortably. "I can't read faces at such a distance, but I like none of this. Bad enough when necromancers raise the spirits of the dead, surely it is worse to summon the not-yet-born. Let's be away from here." The three Germans and the mare turned and went back into the dimness of the alley.

Niccolo wanted to stay, to watch some more, but he was afraid of being left alone in a city full of rampaging troops bereft of discipline or conscience. He scurried back to rejoin his escort. They were silent on the walk back to the bridge, but Niccolo now had a spring in his step that made him seem half his years.

"Nothing seems to have changed here," Jakob said. The sun had moved a bit toward the western horizon, but the officers still shouted at one another by the portcullis. There were some new fires on the Janiculum. He dug out cups and they drank with a thirst unjustified by the exertion of their expedition.

"I am not certain what we have witnessed," Hans said, "but I much prefer the natural, homely sights of plunder and havoc."

"As do I," said Julius, nodding, wine dripping down his moustache.

"Messer Niccolo seems pleased," said Jakob.

"Oh, yes," said Niccolo, his eyes still glowing, his sallow cheeks flushed with more than mere wine. "Now I can die content, knowing that we shall rise again, that men shall one day be rational creatures." He looked at the castle and sneered.

"And let me tell you this: Such princes as we saw today are not the kind to end their days cowering in the bowels of a fortress, while the barbarians gather in the ruins of the empire." He turned back to them, smiling. "Come, friend Hans, fill the cups again. We shall drink to the future." The cups were filled and raised.

"To the future," Jakob said. ●

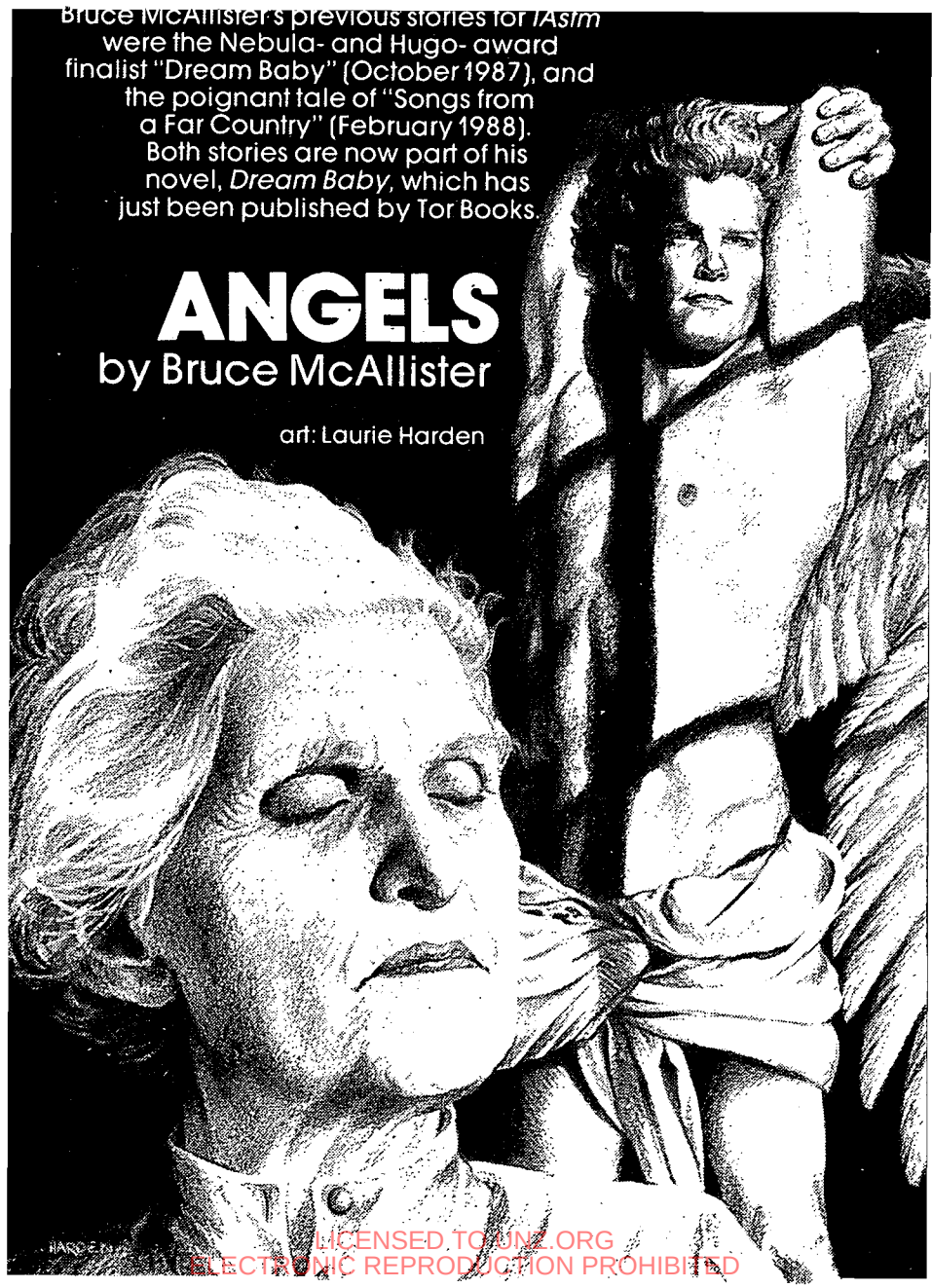
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bruce McAllister's previous stories for *IAsfm* were the Nebula- and Hugo- award finalist "Dream Baby" (October 1987), and the poignant tale of "Songs from a Far Country" (February 1988). Both stories are now part of his novel, *Dream Baby*, which has just been published by Tor Books.

ANGELS

by Bruce McAllister

art: Laurie Harden



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The creature she'd had them make cost her the last piece of forest outside Siena. The one with the little medieval chapel in it, the tall umbrella pines shading a forest floor no tourist had ever walked upon.

It cost her the two rocky islands just south of Elba, and the lead mines at Piombino, which she had never cared about, and the villa on Lake Garda, which she had, because, so small and intimate, it had been one of her father's favorites.

When she ordered the doctors from Milan to alter the creature's spine and shoulder blades to accept the remarkable wings, it cost her the thirty-meter ketch as well—the one with the artificial brain that trimmed the sails perfectly—the one she had used only once, forty years ago, and had never really wanted anyway. And when the wings did not take, when the doctors needed to try again, it cost her the two altar paintings of angels by Giotto from her father's hunting lodge outside Siena, where she had spent her childhood with her brother and sisters, and which her father had loved. She had not wanted to sell the paintings, but selling them had helped her to remember him—to see him standing in the long hallway of the lodge, on the green Carrara marble floor, looking down at her and smiling in the gray suit he always wore. He seemed to be laughing, to be saying: *Yes, you may sell them!*

It was the wings, she realized—the sale of the ketch through an electronic brokerage in Nice—that had alerted her older brother, who found her one day in her apartment in Lucca and in his rage shouted: "What are you *doing*, Pupa? What do you imagine you are *doing*?" She knew he meant: *You are doing this to hurt us. We* ***know*** *you are.*

She had taken a room in the old walled city of Lucca, near the ancient university there, above a store that still sold wood-pulp books, but Giancarlo found her nevertheless and shouted at her, as always. As did her sister Olivia the very next week, while Francesca, the youngest at ninety-three, sent a letter instead. "How can you be doing this?" they all asked her, when they actually meant to say: *How can you be doing this to* ***us, Pupa? How****?*

They did not know she knew what they had done to her children, and this gave them the courage to ask, she told herself.

They were afraid, of course, that she would continue to sell her possessions until everything their father had left her was gone. They were so afraid, in fact, that they were arranging, even now, for doctors from Rome and Turin to testify about her "illness," this madness of hers, in court. These doctors had not interviewed her in person, no, but that did not matter. What she was doing, her lawyers said, was enough—enough for doctors with reputations like theirs to testify against her. "This thing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you are having made for you, *Egregia Signora*, is quite enough," they'd told her.

At these words the world felt a little darker, and she had to remind herself that this was why she was so willing to leave it.

The first time she was allowed to see him, she found she could not look at him for long. He wasn't yet finished; that was all. A woman of childbearing age, chosen by the doctors from a list, had carried the fertilized ovum for her. At one month they'd removed it. It was not like a fetus, the way an infant grew. There were ways to make it grow quickly outside a woman. It would take six months, they'd said.

He was already the size of a man, yet the skin was like scar tissue, covered with a dozen layers of gauze as he lay in a room-sized tent whose material she could barely see through now. The room smelled of chemicals. The light was too bright. His face was covered, too—with a mask that made the eyes bulge like an insect's, which frightened her. It should not have, she knew. It was simply the way he was being grown, she told herself again.

But it did frighten her, and she had to turn away.

When he was at last finished and the gauze was removed, though not the tent, he appeared to be sleeping. Blood substitutes rich in glucose and oxygen were flowing through his veins, the doctors informed her, but from where she stood outside his tent she could not see tubing. There should be tubing, shouldn't there? She could see only the jaundice color of his arms on the bed, his legs parted akimbo under the sheet, like a child's. For weeks she had imagined that he would be able to say something to her at this moment, but that was silly, she knew. It had been a daydream only, week after week, in her little room in Lucca; nothing more. It was not something the doctors had ever promised. Even if he had been awake, he could not have spoken, she knew. He knew no words to speak.

The eyes did not open for days.

When they allowed her into his tent for the first time, they made her bathe first, dried her with gusts of hot air, then gave her a thin garment to wear. As she approached his bed, she saw that his eyes were open at last, that they were watching her, although now and then they rolled back into his head like white marbles and his mouth fell slack. She looked at the doctor beside her, questioning, but the woman nodded, as if saying: *Do not worry, Signora. He is doing fine.*

She was afraid—more afraid than she could ever remember being—but she leaned over nevertheless and touched her lips to his forehead, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way she had done so long ago to three children . . . her own . . . or someone's. She could not remember. No. That wasn't true. She could remember. She'd had three children—a gangly, dark-haired son when she was very young, and then, when she was nearly sixty, two daughters as well. She'd touched her lips to their three foreheads in this same way.

She put her lips to his forehead again and felt his eyes roll away. But he did not pull away from her or hit at her, and these, she realized, were the only things she'd really been afraid of.

One afternoon in August, when the tent was gone and she was standing over his bed, she asked the doctors and nurses to leave them alone. The bed was only a bed. It was the kind any human being could sleep in comfortably. A father, a mother. A child. She could not remember a bed like it from the long century of her life, but it was somehow familiar—a bed a father might sleep in, one a child might climb into in the morning while he slept. A dream, a wish. Nothing more.

His body was blond, just like hers. As she'd told them it should be. It was long and heavy-boned, too, like hers, but the curls on his head were those of a marble god—Athenian, not Spartan—as she'd requested. It had not been difficult, they'd told her. The genetic material was there, they'd said; the alterations, where necessary, would be easy. It was only that no one had ever asked for something like this to be done, or had had the money to pay for it.

The wings had been another matter entirely. Caravaggio's sweeping feathers, the glory of Leda's swan, not the puny things a Giotto might paint. Grown separately—not a part of him at all—and perhaps that had been the problem.

Later, as she sat in a small room that smelled faintly of jasmine, she would remember how on this very August afternoon, when the doctors had left them alone at last, when the first pair of wings were doing their best to take, and the osteomylitis had not yet set in, there had still been hope. The shoulders looked massive; and they would need to be, whether he ever really moved the wings or not, whether the shoulders did nothing more than keep them away from the naked back, so that the stiff quills would not rub the skin raw. He would never fly, of course. No amount of wealth could buy that and this she had known all along. She had simply wanted him to have wings because they were beautiful, because she could remember seeing paintings of beautiful wings somewhere.

The organ between his legs was beautiful too. Pale, golden and rosy—and perfect. It hung like David's, like the white marble under its new dome in Florence, where tourists could walk by it each day. Just as she'd told the doctors it should be. She'd told them: *Make it so that even*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when it is soft, even when he is sleeping, or spent, it is beautiful. Make it so that women will want to touch it even in death.

She had offered them the director of archives at the Pitti Palace, the man who could provide them with drawings by Michelangelo, or arrange for holograms of the statue itself to be delivered if they were needed. But the doctors had said *No*. There were equations for the arc and symmetry of such things, they'd told her, and they would use these.

His arms were covered with hair the color of sunlight, a golden down, and this had been easy, too. Her father had been German, her mother Northern Italian; the blond hair was there to work with. The doctors had seen it in the genetic mapping. It would cost little. Growing the fetus outside a womb would be the costly thing.

He was awake and staring at her now, the wings bound tightly with gauze behind him and supported by a pillow, the sheet gathered to one side of his naked body. He was not embarrassed, she saw. Embarrassment would be one of the things he would have to learn, of course.

One arm was across his stomach, the other by his side. The wings, even with the feathers bound, did not seem to bother him. He looked relaxed and the legs, as always, lay akimbo. They would always lie that way—for as long as he should live, she told herself. These were the habits a body was born with. She could see clearly how each of her own three children had slept—a boy, two girls—each lying a bit differently, like paintings in a hallway somewhere, like holograms inseparable from their souls.

She could not help herself. She tried, but she could not. She imagined what it would be like to make love to him, to feel that perfect organ inside her, her own arms strong once more, her hands on his shoulders perhaps, or her palms on his chest, his curls bright in the sunlight of the garden at Assisi or the topiary garden at Parma, the wings moving as if with a life of their own, his naked back reddening under the sun, arching even as her own back arched, then falling slowly like a sigh from the roses and snapdragons around them.

On that August afternoon, when the doctors left them, she imagined what it might be like to make love with him before words and deeds would change him forever.

•

When they had boosted his immune system with antigens and the engineered leucocytes, and felt it was safe for him to leave the room, she took him to the beach at Viareggio—three weeks before the floats were ready for *la festa*, three weeks before the crowds would parade themselves down the shadowy King's Highway with their rubber clubs and strange masks. The city was dead as winter now. She'd had her people clean the beach around the pines for two hundred meters in all directions, testing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it for salmonella, typhus, any of the things the beach had become famous for in the past thirty years: all the microbes that might hurt him.

Her bodyguards remained in the shadows of the trees, like shadows themselves.

She laid out an old blanket of Yugoslavian cotton embroidered with silver—the one her first husband had given her when they'd begun a life together in the floating city of Taranto, right before the turn of the millennium. The young man could walk now, though unsteadily, the weeks of antibiotic treatments and hydration leaving him weak but happy, his head turning to look at everything, just like a child's. The scars on his shoulder blades were as pink as the bottoms of *putti* in a Tiepolo fresco, as the soles of the feet of the babies she could remember a little more clearly now, and no longer seemed to bother him. The eyes were alive with a feeling she could remember feeling, and as she watched him she felt it too.

They sat down together on the blanket and she gave him an orange, the small red kind they grew in Jaffa. He took it from her but waited, wanting to do it exactly the way she did. So she did it slowly, peeling it carefully, keeping her eyes on his and smiling with each bite, until his movements had lost their nervousness and he was calm again.

She looked at the trees. Later, sitting in the little room, she would remember looking at the trees, seeing the shadows there, and for a moment feeling they were something else . . . a darkness moving closer and closer to her. She laughed. It wouldn't come now, the darkness, unless she asked it to. It was hers to invite. It wouldn't come until she wanted it to.

And it was not the same darkness as before, she knew. The one she had felt in Pisa long ago. . . .

She thought of her father, who had left all four of them many things, but who had left her so much more, and how this had driven her brother and sisters to do many many things.

The shadows remained where they were.

When she turned back to him, he was sleepy again, his eyelids heavy, his left elbow barely holding him up. He would not, she knew, lie down unless she lay down with him. The blanket was big—colorless now in the glare of the sun—and warm, and she lay down with him, making sure that their arms touched.

She watched him as he dreamed. He made a whining noise, the kind she had heard a child make long ago. Then he frowned, his eyes still closed, and the dream gone. His face was quiet again.

The chemical they had put on his skin to protect it from the sun glistened like ocean waves. She let her own eyes close.

Even in this darkness, she was not afraid. The shadows under the trees

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

did not move. Nothing moved toward her that she would not have welcomed.

When he was again rested, she took him by helicopter one evening—in the one infrared Pirelli that remained to her—to the town of Assisi, where they slept together in the largest canopy bed of her villa. He tossed and moaned all night. He hit her four times with his elbow and lay against her quietly only once, for a few minutes. She thought at first that it might be the wings. But that was wrong, wasn't it. The wings were gone. Even the scars could not be bothering him now, could they? Why had she thought he still had wings?

In the morning, her guards escorting them like priests, she took him by the hand down the stone path to the courtyard of the church, to the hologram of Saint Francis that had been there ever since she could remember. The tourists had left. They had been asked to leave. Those who'd objected had been paid handsomely.

The hologram was much larger than life, a full three meters, and the grainy texture of the ruby light made the saint look almost ill. They sat together on one of the benches. The tape played on.

The young man at her side, dressed in summer linen while she wore silk, looked at the grass, at the bees and the bright *farfalle* on the flowers near them, and did not listen. The tape was made of words, she realized suddenly. He did not yet know these words. He did not even know what words were, perhaps.

The red arms of the hologram moved as if in prayer, moved again in exactly the same way, while the voice said:

Laudato si, mi signore, per frate vento et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo, per le quale a le tue creature dai sustentamento.

It said:

"Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, for air and cloud by which Thou upholdest life in every creature."

The voice then repeated the words in French, in German, in four other languages, but she wasn't listening. She was watching the ground, too. She was watching what he was watching there: the green lizard making its way in fits and starts across the stone path, the insects moving through the grass so near their shoes, and the white butterfly that wanted to land, but never did.

"Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom Thou givest us light in the darkness," the voice was saying somewhere. "Praised be my Lord for our sister, the death of our body, from which no man or woman may escape."

An angry voice made her look up suddenly. Two of the guards were arguing with a man, a tourist who wore a single heavy holo-camera

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around his neck. She recognized the camera. Her father's factory in Rimini had made it. She got up quickly, took the young man's hand in hers and pulled him with her, his eyes never leaving the ground.

That night in bed, she took his hand again and thought she might teach him, that it might be possible, that he might enjoy it, but when he looked at her in the dim light of the room and cocked his head like a child, she knew she could not.

They tried to kill him the very next week. They were afraid that she would find new ways to spend, on this thing she'd had the doctors make for her, the very wealth they believed was theirs, the wealth their many lawyers had assured them would indeed be theirs, because at her passing—the one they knew she was planning (an injection in the vein of one arm? a perfumed gas in a little perfumed room?)—it would pass to them. There was no one else—no children, no other siblings, no organization whose rights could not be successfully contested—to whom her wealth should go. Their lawyers could not assure them, however, that she would not put a new skin, another pair of wings, a scaly tail, a second head on this creature, and so it needed to be killed, didn't it?

They tried at Lake Como during the height of the tourist season, while she was sleeping on the deck of the biggest villa, tired out by the sun. The young man was standing on the dock just below her, looking down into the dark waters as he always did, and only a movement by the quickest guard was able to save him. The hydrofoil removed the first ten meters of the dock, somehow avoided the retaining wall, and moved down the lake without stopping. Shaking, naked, she stood in the sunlight and *knew*.

To the guard, a middle-aged Tuscan by the name of Cichinelli, she gave one of the new apartment buildings in the Ligurian castle-town of Pozzuoli, smiling as she presented him with the papers the next day. To the other guards, who would certainly have done the same had they been able, she presented new Alfa Stellanovas. Someone back at the lodge would report it all, of course. Even the smile, she knew.

When they tried again, at Assisi, in the garden there, while she sat with him quietly on a bench watching the lizards move on the walls, and the bullets from the assassin's rifle shattered the marble corner, she had him moved back to Siena, to within the grounds of her father's hunting lodge. It would cost her two of the gambling barges in Trieste to establish the newest security technology on the grounds. It would cost her half of her interest in the cablecar network on Anacapri—the one her father had given her when she was twelve—to establish the same for the building in Lucca, which she no longer used. All of this would be reported to her brother and her sisters, she knew.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Being with him each day, holding his hand, helped her to *remember*. Was this perhaps why she'd had him made? She saw it clearly the day she led him through the hallways of the hunting lodge to show him all of the paintings of wings—the very kind she had once hoped he might have. Caravaggio's "Angeli di Dio." Fra Angelico's "Il Sogno del Cielo." The dancing angels of Turacco, the long wings of Pagano. The paintings had always been there. They lined the oak walls of the hallways, as they always had, but as she watched him look at them, as she watched him turn to her with questions in his eyes—because he had no *words* to ask them—it came to her suddenly:

They had been her father's paintings. He had given them to *her*. He had loved them; he had loved the wings.

How could she have forgotten? How?

They were never going to try the poison, she admitted to herself finally. The cardiotoxin they had used on Piero, her gangly son, sixty years old the day he drove his two sisters, teenagers, from Old Genoa down the *galleria* highway to the birthday party for her in Pisa—the gradual poison in his veins, the Alfa Romeo D'Oro tumbling to the rocks at Cinque Terre, the bodies floating in the bay, like pale ghosts, for three whole hours. For some reason they were not going to try it this time and she was sorry. Perhaps they knew; perhaps they did not. The doctors had made alterations and it would not have worked this time.

It had cost her half of what her father had left her to have the creature made. The other half remained, and this was what her brother and sisters wanted—more than anything in the world.

Love is sometimes a terrible thing, she would remember thinking, sitting in a little room.

In September he began to make sounds with his throat at last. He tried to make her understand what he wanted by them, and she did her best to understand. But she did not try to teach him a language. It would have taken too long, she knew. Others would have the time. For now she wanted him to herself, before words could change him.

She could remember it now. Lying on the beach at Viareggio as a child, her father, his beard, the crow's feet at the corners of his eyes, his eyes bluer than any Italian should have had. His hands were in his pockets, his legs only a few steps away in the warm sand. The sunlight seemed to go forever. A poet had died there, she knew. Even as a child she had known this. It had bothered her even then—that a poet could have drowned in such a beautiful sea, the Ligurian Sea, near where her own mother had been born, and where she, even now in memory, was a child

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

playing in the sand, her father, his beard, his legs so near her in a sunlight that went forever.

She could remember it now. She could remember him standing in the sand, day after day, and saying: *Tu sei mi'angelo, Pupa.*

You are my angel. You will always be my angel, Pupa.

It was the last thing she would need to remember, she knew, sitting in a room that smelled of jasmine, breathing it in at last.

The young man sat in the corner of another room and tried his best to think. It was difficult. The men and women around him were telling him—in words, ones he had only recently learned to understand—how many things in the world were now his, how these things could never be taken from him, and how this was all that the woman had really wanted. ●

NEAT STUFF

(Continued from page 67)

support from the dozens of shops you can visit. Sears is on-line, as well as J.C. Penney's and a host of specialty stores. When you order, Prodigy will have your printer run off a receipt.

It's lots of fun, the perfect introduction to the world of modems. But soon you'll want a complete information service, and GEnie (401 North Washington St., Rockville, Maryland 20850) has become incredibly popular, growing quickly to challenge the long-time champ, Compuserve. GEnie shows the limits of Prodigy and the true scope of on-line services.

There are Professional Roundtables where everyone from corporate lawyers to poodle fanciers can share information. The Science Fiction Writers Roundtables are of special interest, and novelist Jerry Pournelle is hosting a Roundtable. Real-time guests are a regular feature, ranging from Tom Clancy to Harlan Ellison, who spent three hours on-line. Dozens of hardware and software companies are on-line with expert advice and help.

And there are games, with GEnie's Air Warrior an excellent multiplayer World War dog-fight game. Like Prodigy, GEnie offers an on-line version of the Grolier Encyclopedia, but also other news and information services that make it much more suitable for research. You can down-load programs in GEnie—impossible with Prodigy—joining thousands of hackers who swap programs and shareware.

GEnie charges $5.00–$6.00 per non-prime hour. So while I gingerly use GEnie for work and relaxation, Prodigy remains an enjoyable and economical tool for the family. My wife can buy aerobic sneakers, I can check the weather, and my kids can play *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* without my worrying about how long we've been on-line. ●

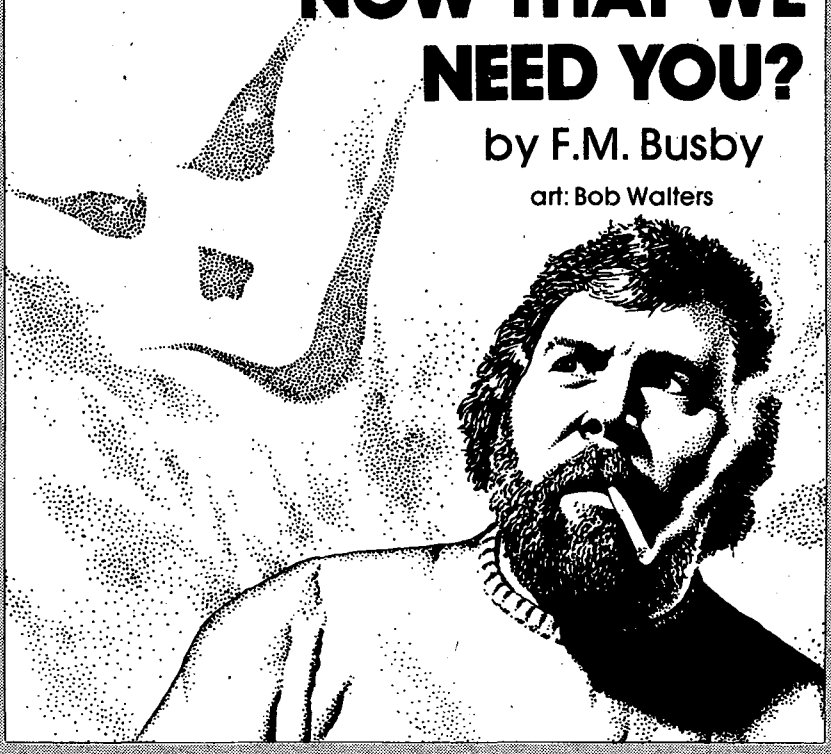
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

F.M. Busby is the author of forty short stories and thirteen novels. His work has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, and some of his tales have been reprinted in his collection *Getting Home*. His fourteenth novel, *Slow Freight to Forever*, will be published by Bantam in a year or so. After too long a hiatus from our pages, Mr. Busby returns with a tale that dares to ask . . .

WHERE ARE YOU, GUY DE MAUPASSANT, NOW THAT WE NEED YOU?

by F.M. Busby

art: Bob Walters



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

August 3rd

Coming to the island was a mistake. Granted that the use of Rachael's uncle's cabin, and permission to borrow liberally from his winter supplies, is a godsend.

It's not that I have a cash flow problem; I have very little cash and no flow at all. Rachael's offer, it seemed, would give me what I needed: food and shelter at little or no cost, and a hiding place from creditors, long enough to meet Grogan's publishing deadline and unloose his purse strings.

Lacking electricity I suppose I can manage with the old manual portable the man left here; lacking WD-40, a bit more Three-in-One should free up its stuck keys. I'm not used to typewriters any more; screens and floppies have spoiled me. But if *that* were the only trouble . . .

She'd taken me to lunch, Rachael had, on her slim assistant editor's budget, and kindly agreed to a table in the smoking section. In return I agreed to sit downwind of her, and refrained from ordering either a double martini or the scallops.

Over coffee we got down to it. I'd lost too much time to be able to deliver the book by deadline, if I also needed to do odd assignments for living expenses. And the good Grogan had had it up to here with emergency advances; Rachael shrugged and said, "Once too often to the well."

What could I do? We talked about possibilities, getting nowhere, and were rising to leave when, abruptly, she sat again.

I stared. "What—?"

"Sit a mo; I'm in labor with an idea," and she told me about her mother's sister's husband, Oscar Hildebrandt, who owned a cabin on a remote island. "I bet he'd let you stay there."

And so it came about. I sublet my apartment to Bo Chuck Donaghy who agreed to store most of my kipple while I was away. All I brought along, besides clothing and other personal necessities such as seven cartons of cigarettes, were writing supplies, including the ms.-to-date, and my long-barreled Ruger in the .44 Magnum edition. Plus ammo.

I'd hoped for something in the way of a tropical retreat, but after stints on Amtrak, the Alaska Ferry System, and a puddle-jumping float plane, I arrived at this clump of subarctic rain forest called Chimorsky, a map dot alongside the west coast of Prince of Wales Island, facing the Gulf of Alaska. Instead of Polynesian beauties I found at the dockside of Chimorsky village a few Inuits, some Aleuts displaced by World War Two, and the Alaskan equivalent of Mountain Men. Redneck is, I believe, not an unfair term.

Yet those rough diamonds are more to my taste than the specimens whose settlement squats adjacent to Uncle Hildebrandt's fief. Approach-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing this cabin from the rocky beach a quarter-mile below, I rounded a turn in the narrow, bulldozed trail to find a clearing full of nondescript wooden buildings. Following behind my gear as it rode precariously in the bin of Pilchuck Charlie's three-wheeled moped, I met some of its inhabitants.

What we have here, friends, is a New Age commune.

This I swear by the beard of such prophet as you may prefer.

The leftover Flower Children speak a dialect of California Mellow; the younger enthusiasts are "into" channeling and spirit guides. Those whose names begin with Ma have probably straggled from the Bhagwan's ex-empire at Antelope, Oregon; why can't they let Bhagwans be Bhagwans?

As we reached a wider stretch of trail, which serves as the community's major thoroughfare, Pilchuck and his moped stopped to catch their respective breaths. I stopped also, and hunched away from the wind to light a cigarette. To be challenged immediately by a tall young man's barking tones: "You can't smoke here!"

Being a veteran of nicotine harassment, I bristled. "I don't see any zoning sign. Perhaps you forgot to post it."

If you're *always* right, it can be hard to handle confident dissent. As the man groped for words I scrutinized him: longish scraggly blond hair, beard worn in the stubble popular on some TV shows but not with me personally. Large gaud dangling from his left earlobe, fashion-faded denim jeans and jacket streaked with less fashionable grease and food stains. Not a soulmate of mine, nor even close.

I missed his next line because Charlie restarted the moped, bringing off a few good backfires. As the vehicle and Charlie and I began to move away, the tall man followed.

But from the left came a young woman running, screaming, one hand holding the other arm tight against her chest—but with little effect on the copious flow of blood.

I hardly noticed her looks or dress; the squared rictus of her mouth, and its shrill sounds, were all that registered. Except her message: "Clawed me! Wasn't even there, but it tore up my arm—and it *killed* Valerie!"

Someone else yelled "The shooting star! It was an omen!" I concentrated on the injured girl, who had been addressed as Alethia. Literally taken, her words made no sense. But if something or someone were killing and maiming young women, some kind of action seemed indicated.

I waved Pilchuck to a halt and rummaged in my duffle bag to find, then load, my Ruger. "All right," I said. "Which way did the attacker go?"

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, the hell with them. The tall one, with the big cheap bangle on his ear, began shouting in no uncertain terms that not only were smokers barred from New Atlantis (New Atlantis? Spare me.) but also guns, equally if not more so. "You give me that thing, right now!" Lance Hostettler, Charlie says the fellow's name is. He doesn't look like a Lance: more like a stand of frazzled bulrushes. But the crowd liked it.

Some reaches of idiocy defy answer. I could have used one of the lines Bo Chuck wrote for the macho lead in his new play, but none came to mind. I settled for pointedly swinging the long barrel toward Lance, then away from him, and turned to follow Pilchuck Charlie the hell out of there.

As the rain began in earnest.

So here I am, in a cabin with a tin stove and no electric. At best, the kerosene lamp gives a yellow glow. The gasoline model, with its asbestos mantles and all, would do considerably better, but I've pumped it up twice and it still won't take. When all else fails, read the instructions; tomorrow I'll comb the place for them, but not tonight.

Even with better light I couldn't work on the ms. I have most of the portable's action loosened up, but the "L" key still jams, and Lillian is a major character. Notes, though, I can make; pencils have no moving parts. (Keep the faith, Grogan!) If only I hadn't had to sell my battery-operated laptop!

But what on Earth could it have been, that nearly tore that poor woman's arm off? And where is it now?

Some places in Alaska, they put steel bars on the windows to keep food-prowling bears from breaking in. No bears here on Chimorsky, I'd guess; Uncle Oscar's cabin makes do with wooden shutters. For what good they may be, I've closed them.

Coming here may have been a *big* mistake.

August 5th

It's worse than I'd thought. Oh, I unstuck my "L" key and clunked out two new chapters (with all too many typing errors; here I can produce only draft copy), and even without benefit of instructions I have the gasoline lamp working. But either Uncle hadn't laid in his winter supplies or young Lance's people have made inroads that would do credit to any bear; I am short of several staples.

Yesterday, seeking to remedy the lack, I started downtrail toward Chimorsky village, hoping to set up a line of credit. But at the New Age enclave I was faced by Lance and some few others, there to deny me passage.

Lance is not the head cheese. Now I met her: a woman calling herself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Astaroth, "channeler" for Ra-something-or-other, who is (surprise!) the mighty warrior king of a great golden city some eighty thousand years past. Why can't these New Age people know anything at all about human prehistory?

"You'll have to turn over that gun," she told me, flat pale eyes staring, "and all tobacco, alcohol, or any other drugs. Or you won't be allowed to pass through here."

Well. Even if I were so minded, I could hardly shoot my way through fifty-odd of them. Be damned, though, if I'd give them leave to plunder my belongings.

Astaroth is an aging siren with masses of unkempt dyed red hair and a figure most charitably described as overripe. When she rolls her eyes up and growls in her very best Ra-whatsit voice, her vocal cords grate like gravel. But she knows what she wants, and the tribe follows her lightest whim.

"You will not pass here," she said for perhaps the dozenth time. "You are ill-omened. The comet struck," she waved a hand toward the hills above, "and next day you were here. You, and the evil spirit that kills, are the comet's bringing. You—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! The comet—" Surely she meant a meteorite; comets don't sneak in unannounced. "It has nothing to do with me. I flew here riding shotgun with Einar Knudson's mail delivery, and you know it."

Logic got me nowhere; like most of her ilk, this queen of psychic malarkey has severe Data Errors on Drive B. Eventually I gave up and trudged uphill, back to the cabin.

So why, it might be asked, do I need to traverse their camp at all? The answer is the coastal terrain of Southeastern Refrigerator. For thousands of years the forests have grown, fallen at haphazard angles, and been buried under new growth. A sample walk, that afternoon, from my cabin directly down toward the beach, covered about one hundred yards in something over an hour. There are deadfalls upon deadfalls, the spaces between sometimes filled with dirt and humus, sometimes not, so that one comes upon huge gaping pits, twenty or thirty feet wide and at least as deep, no way around without going back and retracing one's path at indefinite length. I was lucky, I felt, to regain the cabin before dark. No, the bulldozed trail is my only feasible way out of here.

One aspect of my overland scramble I hesitate to mention. Occasionally I heard movement in the thick brush, movement that could have been a large animal. But although I saw foliage sway, never did I espy that which impelled it.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

August 6th

Once again I thought to try reason on Astaroth's group. I found them milling around, distraught—not concerned, for once, with enforcing moral superiority. I could have passed, but curiosity got the better of me and I asked a young woman what the trouble might be.

It was Alethia, the one who'd been injured earlier. Her arm rested in a sling, and her pale face was serious as she said, "That thing came again. It killed Edward and took Anna away. And clawed Lance, or maybe bit him, something awful!"

And what was it, that did these foul deeds? "We don't *know;* nobody sees it!" The more she told, the harder I found it to believe. They'd heard a commotion, thuddings and screams and a sort of highpitched keening, in the hut of Edward and Anna. Then *something* had burst out through the door, carrying the woman, and gone crashing into the surrounding brush. "But there was nothing there! Just a kind of blur, in the dust that was stirred up."

"Are you sure you had a good look?" Because it had been raining hard, earlier; the dust she mentioned must have come from inside the hut (housekeeping was not, perhaps, Edward's or Anna's strong point). "What did the others say?"

"She tells the truth, ill-omened one." It was Astaroth, as usual seated firmly on her high horse. "We all saw the same thing." If these people were uniformly of the Mellow persuasion, I'd suspect they were all *dropping* the same thing.

As it was, though . . . the troops had gathered, dead-set against my passage; again I began the trek to my less-than-sweet home.

Anxiety makes hearts beat faster and breath come shorter. So does uphill climbing; no wonder the mind sometimes confuses the two effects. Which is to say that once out of sight of the slapdash community, I found myself very nervous indeed, starting at minor sounds or movements in the brush.

That wouldn't do; resolutely I ignored the small disturbances. In fact I did such a fine job of it that when the larger noises came, some seconds passed before I turned to see what might be causing them.

At first, none of it made any sense. Then I began to understand: the sounds and foliage movements indicated a large creature rushing toward me—and at nothing like a safe distance. I saw no sign of the thing itself, just the brush thrashing; I heard muffled gasps, like someone panting open-throated to minimize noise. *What—?*

Instinct urged me to move 1,440 grains of virgin lead, in six installments, from the cylinder of my .44 (unholstered without thought) to the commotion's source.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But what if, despite all logic, a human were there? Natives, perhaps, knew how to get through tangles I couldn't penetrate. Or—

Whatever it was, was too damned close! Scruples be damned, I squeezed the trigger. From the brush came a burst of sound, a howl so high and intense it seemed directly at my ears, more felt than heard. I'd experienced the same effect in freshman physics, when someone cranked a Jackson Oscillator, at maximum output, up past the top of my hearing range.

Again I fired, again the shriek came, and now the crashing sounds receded. Hit or not, the thing had been turned back.

Curious, though still gasping in panic mode, I ventured into the brush until I reached the near end of a trampled lane flanked by torn leaves and branches. To one side, where I'd aimed, jutted the moss-covered end of a giant deadfall, and in two places my bullets had dislodged gobbets of moss.

On the ground before that massive trunk, some of the leaves showed moisture; now as I watched, the wet spots darkened.

Blood, of course—or so one would expect. Except that the stuff wasn't quite the right color.

Still August 6th

I feel better. My dinner included the four basic food groups: pork, beans, raisins, and coffee—with bourbon and a cigarette for dessert. Stomach appeased, now I have some time to think.

Whatever it may be, the monster's real. But not, apparently, to be sensed by normal light.

How this can be eludes explanation; the odd-hued blood came visible gradually, less than a minute after being separated from the parent organism by courtesy of Mr. Ruger. Dead, one assumes, the entire creature could be seen.

The trick, of course, is to produce that condition. But judging by the thing's track record to date, I wouldn't bet too much on trying it.

There's a nasty, nagging familiarity about this outré situation, and now I remember the source: Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla." His ogre came from the South American jungles. Ours, I think, arrived via Astaroth's "comet," proving that in the rare case, even a fungusbrain can be right.

But neither Guy's entity nor ours can be seen. Nor, come to think of it, could H.G. Wells's *Invisible Man.* The latter had swallowed something to change the refractive index of his entire body to that of air, but so that his bloke could see, Wells had to fudge a bit and allow the retinas

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to show. For our beast here, we could posit that it sees by infrared—or perhaps, like bats, by sonic radar.

Yet again, despite its uncouth dining habits, we might have an intelligent being in an invisibility suit, which refracts all light around itself. Here, too, we could have sensors reacting to out-of-spectrum "light."

Whatever the case, one can't see the damned thing!

There has been a distraction. About a half hour ago, after a bout of screaming in the distance, I heard sounds of movement approaching. Snuffing the gasoline lamp I sneaked a look outside. Not to worry; the intruder was Alethia, carrying a backpack and lighting her way with a competent battery-powered "railroad lantern." Detecting more ominous noises further down the trail, I hustled her in and barred the door.

"What are you doing here?" As I relit the lamp she looked dismayed, so I added, "You're welcome, of course. But why—?"

Violently, she shook her head. "They're crazy down there!"

"More than usually?"

"It got another one. The *thing,* I mean. Melissa, this time. Some of us wanted something *done,* and you know what?"

Obviously not; my brows raised. She said, "Astaroth told us not to worry; she was invoking Ra-putandtake—" Well, that's what it sounded like. "—to protect us." Her grin came weakly. "I decided, maybe guns do make better sense."

And maybe there was hope, yet, for this flower of the New Age. I said, "Weren't you afraid? Out there by yourself?"

"Sure I was. But we'd heard Melissa screaming all the way down to the water, sounded like, so I had a head start. I did think, just as I got here, I heard it coming behind me. But—"

"But you're here, and—for the moment, at least—safe." Listening, I heard nothing. She'd eaten, but I had coffee left; she accepted some. As she sipped, I looked at her and thought.

Under the grime her small, pert face had the makings of a pleasant appearance. Given a good wash and combing she might, I thought, be rather presentable. And she had at least two brain cells rubbing together to produce the spark of reason.

But would she survive to undergo such changes, or I to see them? Briefly I hefted the railroad lantern; a touch to its switch gave a shocking bright flash of light. The batteries, it seemed, were healthy. My pulse rate and adrenaline level rose.

I moved the cabin's lone wooden chair to the rear wall, facing the door, and beside it set a crate, on which I placed the lantern, my bourbon and a tumbler, plus the ancient hubcap that serves as an ashtray.

From the chair I also had a good view of both shuttered windows, one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in each side wall. Beside the cabin's rear corner to my left was a back door, no longer used; that's where I pointed. "Unroll your sleeping bag there, Alethia. You'll be out of the way; if the beast does get in, then for what your life's worth, stay put and be silent."

She gave the bed one longing look, then nodded. "But—by a *door?*"

"It's nailed shut, probably has been for years. Outside, there's stove wood piled against it. But you'll get a nice draft through the crack underneath." She looked skeptical. "Oh, you'll need it; take my word."

She deployed her bedding; we made ready for the night. The semi-shelter of the rudimentary outhouse was obviously off limits, so we made do with the number-ten can I'd brought in earlier from the midden heap, each in turn facing away to give the other privacy.

When she'd crawled into the nondescript sleeping bag, I settled myself in the chair and extinguished the gasoline lamp. Then I lit a cigarette.

"Do you *have* to smoke?" Her voice showed petulance.

"Yes. Yes, I do. Definitely."

Soon I heard gentle snores. Heart pounding, I waited.

August 12th

After longer than I would have liked, I did get ice brought from Chimorsky village, so what's left of the thing stays fairly well preserved. It took four hits before it went down, and I gave it the other two for luck, but perhaps I was a bit extreme in carving X's on the snub noses of my .44 loads; the dum-dum effect left so little of the creature's skull that we can't be sure if it were a sentient alien or the equivalent of a hunting cheetah, let alone how many eyes it may have had (if any). All but three or four of the clawed limbs are relatively intact, though, as well as most of the torso and its unfamiliar organs.

The invisibility was organic, not artificial. In death the skin is a singularly unappealing fishy-iridescent grey, and the insides aren't much better. No one's happy with me about the state of the carcass. But as I see it, the complainants weren't the ones who had to cope with its pre-carcass behavior.

As an information source, the crash site wasn't much better. According to one of the government investigators, the "comet" seems to have done a kind of cold meltdown; what's left is an aggregate of unlikely alloys emitting slow neutrons plus a few intriguing types of pions, muons, and what have you, as well as the occasional fierce burst of gamma. The sort of research site that calls for leadlined knickers.

Aside from massive official disapproval, I'm doing wonderfully well. When, via Coast Guard radio, I told Grogan what I had for him on condition of a reasonable additional advance, the man came through nobly. The New Age contingent, harassed by a Federal Marshal's queries

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about a number of deaths no one had bothered to report, has taken its leave to points elsewhere. Alethia seemed set on staying here, until it penetrated her thinking that when a man and a woman live together, sexual activity might well result. May she prosper.

November 17th

So I have removed from Alaska to my previous apartment. It was but the work of several weeks and a writ of malfeasance to clear the place of Bo Chuck Donaghy and others who moved in while he wasn't looking. I have learned to cope with the infernal electronic golem with which Rachael replaced my wonderful old CP/M computer after Bo Chuck threw it out the window, and on this thing I have completed my earlier book for Grogan and am preparing to polish the final lines of my upcoming bestseller, *The Chimorsky Connection.*

Here's the draft:

Waiting, straining to hear outdoor sound over Alethia's snores—which were not, after all, dependably gentle—I lit another cigarette. Over the past few hours, chain-smoking, I'd gone through at least three packs. To the point that I was no longer fond of my favorite vice. But a man has to do what a man has to do. Even though it scares him near to witless.

As the match flare died, I reopened my sneakily closed eyes and listened carefully. At the lefthand window, something stirred. I waited. At first I heard only light scratching, as of a small and timid animal. The thing was testing me!

Still I waited. Until of a sudden the window—screen, shutters, glass, all of it—imploded into the cabin. At the first crash, I switched on the lantern.

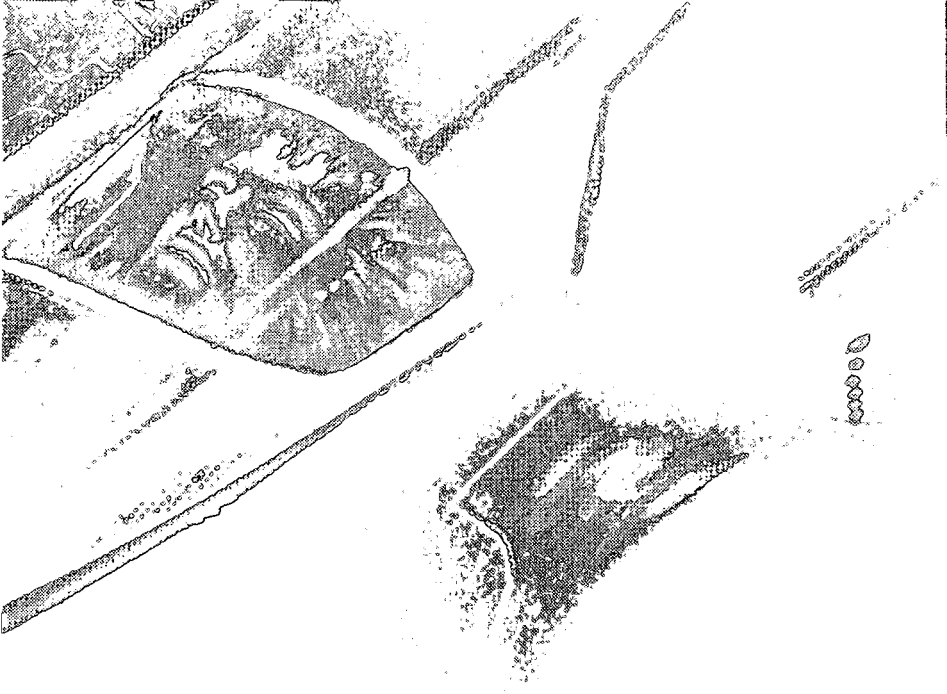
And shouting like a banshee, blew the absolute living hell out of our extrasolar carnivore.

Invisible, yes. But in a room where I had smoked steadily for hours, it would have been hard to miss the big moving blur where the smoke *wasn't.*

Too bad "The Horla's" narrator didn't smoke. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ELEGY FOR ANGELS AND DOGS

by Walter Jon Williams

art: A. C. Farley

Walter Jon Williams's last story for *IAsfm*, "No Spot of Ground" (November 1989), is a novella that—with other stories first published in these pages—can be found in his collection, *Facets* (Tor Books). His new novel, *Angel Station*, should be appearing in paperback sometime this summer.

Copyright 1990 by Walter Jon Williams

LICENSED TO WIZ OF OZ
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTE: The following story is set, with permission, in the universe of Roger Zelazny's "The Graveyard Heart."

The lights went out and the party (or the Party) started (or recommenced). Cao Cao gave Lamoral a cigar.

"It's a boy," he said in his slight, charming, Oxonian lisp. The band began to play a slow dance, the light gravity permitting little else.

Lamoral stuck the cigar in his polymerized cuirass. In the computer-enhanced view granted by his high-tech spectacles, Cao Cao's skin was a brilliant orange and his teeth were green. His name, at least to a Westerner, was pronounced as that of a black-tongued Chinese dog.

"The child isn't even born yet," Lamoral said.

"These days, 1A, that's strictly a formality."

"My dance," said Carolly, and Lamoral swept her away, leaving orange Cao Cao in his wake.

Back on Earth, and indeed everywhere, it was Shakespeare's birthday.

X marked the spot, the spot being Ariel, the X a grand feature upon it. The light of the sun, such as it was, was insignificant this far out. Seen without video specs Uranus was a creamy, featureless blue, Ariel was umber, the rings were black, and Titania, Miranda, and Umbriel, suspended in one corner of the sky or another, were black-upon-black. With the shades, it was as if Oberon—the King of Faërie was currently eclipsed by Uranus—had waved his majestic hand and created a polychrome miracle. Giant Uranus dazzled across half the sky, green and red, with little silver clouds floating on its surface. The rings, a series of wedding bands mating the old castrated Creator to his consorts, were a brilliant gold. Frost blazed silver on the piled-up ramparts of the X. The satellites overhead seemed to churn with color.

"Cao Cao's such a bastard," said Carolly. "You're stepping on my feet."

"Sorry. I was watching the sky."

"You used to have eyes only for me."

Lamoral looked at her. "That was before your skin turned its current carrot shade."

"Turn off your glasses."

Lamoral did so. The Party Set, dressed as characters from Shakespeare's comedies, danced dimly in the dark. Scene, Lamoral thought, from *The Bard in Hell.*

"You're still stepping on me."

"Beg pardon. Now I can't see anything at all."

"You're off your stride, Lamoral." She sighed. "And so am I. Let's get something to drink."

There was an insistent draft on his knees. He was Theseus; she was a hopeful Rosalind in green hose, though a bit old for the part. His Attic Majesty's armor rattled as he handed her bright hippocras. They moved toward the rim of the Party Barge. Miranda swirled past, crowned by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wildflowers, pursued by a lustful Aguecheek. Carolly crooked an eyebrow.

"A lot of Mirandas out tonight." Tartly.

"What's he got, d'you suppose?"

"Cao Cao?"

A brittle laugh keened above the music: one of the Mirandas. The sound seemed a little too frantic for this early in the evening.

"Lilt," said Carolly, answering his question. Her voice dripped acid.

Lamoral's twin brother Alexander, playing at being the Duke of Vienna playing at being a friar, rotated past with Indira Batish, who was one of the constellation of Mirandas. Later in the evening Alex would reveal his true ducal majesty; there was lace winking like silver from under his habit.

"Your brother dances better than you." Carolly's voice was still pungent.

"He's not as distracted."

"At least you didn't blame your partner. I thank you for that."

At the edge of the transparent dome of the Party Barge was a silhouette. A brocade Tudor coif framed a waterfall of dark hair.

"Sandy," said Lamoral.

Her gown rustled as she turned. Her dark face was pale against the black-dusted walls of Ariel's X. Long-fingered hands were folded gracefully over her belly.

"A lovely costume," Carolly said.

"Thank you," said Sandrea Salazar.

"The source isn't immediately apparent."

"Queen Hermione."

There was a hopeful pause as each tried to remember the appropriate play.

"Excuse me." Sandrea bobbed a half-curtsey and swept away into the swaying Set.

Lamoral looked after her. "I wonder," he said, the track of a thought that never really lighted.

"*Winter's Tale*," said a new voice. Wayne Unger appeared, dressed as Robin Goodfellow. His high-tech specs somehow enhanced, rather than spoiled, the illusion.

Lamoral tried to remember if he'd ever read the play in question.

"Queen Hermione," Unger prompted. "Poor lady. A wronged woman altogether."

Which, Lamoral decided, summed it up.

The Party Set was back, better than ever! That was the message being sent from the Party Barge, the tour of Uranus's moons. Forget the Crash of '30! The Bad Decade was over, and taste and elegance once again reigned supreme.

Or at least the Party Set's version of taste and elegance. Chosen for beauty and accomplishment, available for only a few excursions each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

year, frozen between engagements, the Set members were guaranteed eternal youth, eternal charm, eternal riches, and the eternal envy of those who watched their every waking moment on vid.

"Does it make you want to climb again, Lamoral?" Puck, fiddling with the settings on his shades, peered out of what Lamoral had christened the Party Barge. Behind him, Carolly gazed fitfully at the unchanging landscape.

"Mount those extraterrestrial cliffs?" Unger went on. "Plant your footprints atop those airless peaks?" An ocean had passed his lips this night; he was swaying as if with the tide.

"Not really."

"Not to the conquerer of K2, of Olympus Mons? The sight of those walls doesn't make you swoon with desire to reassemble a new version of the old triumvirate?"

"Hormayr's dead."

"I know, but—"

"He's still dead."

Unger gave a heavy sigh. "I'm disappointed."

"Climbing in light gravity is dead easy. I could probably bound up the sides of the X in a couple jumps. I might even end up in orbit."

Unger smiled. "Climbers should always use a safety line."

Lamoral contemplated his drink and thought of Hormayr. "So we should."

"I was hoping you'd want to make the attempt, so I could talk you into taking me with you. I'd like to replace Hormayr, at least for this one climb."

Lamoral looked at him for a moment and wondered whether or not to take this seriously. Unger, somewhat to Lamoral's surprise, seemed perfectly sincere.

"Why Ariel?" he said finally.

"I think it's the black snow. The idea is so . . . passionless, if you know what I mean. All the effort, just to plant your feet on ashes. The burnt-out ends of smoky days . . . And, up there, dead silence. Just hydrogen crying in your headphones."

"Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season," said Carolly. Dryly.

Unger looked sulky.

"Just write the poem, Unger," Carolly advised.

"Sometimes one needs the experience."

"You could ask Alex," Lamoral said. "He's as good a climber as I."

"Your twin is too cheerful. He would intrude." Unger seemed hurt by Lamoral's refusal.

"Sorry," said Lamoral, not sorry at all. He possessed no desire whatever to venture into that soul-sapping twilight.

Unger reached into his jerkin and pulled out one of Cao Cao's cigars. He lit it and stared out the ship's dome.

"My glass is empty," said Carolly.

"Let's refill it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The poet remained behind fiddling with his spectacles, turning dark into light and back again.

His job, after all.

Set dances had grown longer and more intricate, on the theory they should be the sort of thing only Set members could do. The theory was fallacious, since the rest of the world had a lot more time to practice, not having months to sleep between engagements. The dancers' patterns were not therefore without flaw, but at least the mistakes were made with style, and it was difficult to tell an honest error from an inspired improvisation. The dances had been adapted for low gravity: couples formed little solar systems, orbited each other at arm's length, their opposing velocities keeping them anchored in space, preventing an excess of enthusiasm from shooting them like cannonballs into the dome of the Party Barge.

"Been talking to our only convicted murderer?"

Thomas Edwardes and his partner were at the end of the set major, waiting to reenter the dance at the beginning of the next figure. Edwardes was dressed as some noble Elizabethan personage or other, a cap with a feather tilted over one ear, a sword at his side.

"You speak," said Lamoral, "as if there are others who haven't been convicted."

Edwardes winked.

"It strikes me," said Carolly, "that murder is far too intimate an act for our subject to participate in directly. I'm sure he hired it done."

Edwardes gave a brittle, all-too-familiar laugh: Lilt. The awaited figure came, and he stepped into the dance. Carolly and Lamoral refilled their glasses and watched the Party Set move in their orbits.

The dance came to an end. Alex and Indira Batish came giggling toward the bar. "I was telling Alex," Indira said to Lamoral, "that the two of you should have come as the Ephesian and Syracusan Antipholuses. Or is it Antipholi?"

"Antipholoi, I think," said Lamoral.

"Whichever. You should have done it."

"We get mistaken for each other enough as it is."

"Not by me."

Alex smirked. "Are you sure, my dear? It was dark, that Midwinter's Eve. Or so Lamoral told me."

Indira raised an eyebrow. "I've told you apart in the dark before. Why shouldn't I have then?"

Alex clutched his chest and mock-staggered. Indira smiled and asked for wine.

The orchestra began again. Lamoral espied, in the darkness, the wronged Queen of Sicilia.

He made his excuses and followed.

"Join the dance?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't think so, 1A. I'm not in the mood."

At her voice Lamoral's heart gave an indecent little lurch. He told it to behave itself.

"Cao Cao insists on calling me that," he said. "May I hope you won't follow his example?"

"But—to quote someone or other in the dim, dear past—you can look it up."

"Only if you browse through the *Almanach de Gotha*. Not your sort of reading, I'd think."

She gave him a look. "But it's *your* sort, isn't it? And so it must be with the other 1As. Just because they're 1As. They can't help it, and neither can you."

"I'm not here," said Lamoral, "to talk about me."

"You never are."

"Are you sure you won't dance?"

Sandrea Salazar sized him up for a long moment, then held out her arms, the hands dangling, puppetlike. "Do your worst," she said.

He swung her onto the floor in a series of cool, precise orbits. "You don't have to leave the Set," he said.

"I'm leaving because I want to."

"It's not—" He searched for words. How to tell her that he knew her for a creature of impulse, that this impulse to leave the Party Set and bear her child was one she would regret? She was not in the mood for dancing, which meant she was already beginning to regret; but of course she wouldn't admit it. She was going to be stubborn until it was too late.

"The Set was made for you, Sandy," he said. "You delight us all with your presence. Speaking purely out of my own self-interest—"

"As you always do . . ."

"I'll miss you."

Her long eyes looked up into his from beneath soaring wings of elaborate stage makeup. "Try to bear up," she said.

Lamoral surrendered. "I will say no more whilst this fey spirit is upon you."

They orbited for a while in silence. Lamoral thought about Sandy, Cao Cao, and murder. He would have to do better than Unger: it would have to be something better than a stake through the heart this time.

Silly to kill a person over someone he didn't love.

And he didn't love her, right?

"I haven't been gone from the real world for too long," Sandrea said. "I can fit in again."

"As well as you ever did," he said. Knowing she never had.

Sandrea seemed to understand his meaning. "It'll be different. I'll have a child," she said.

"A boy, or so I hear."

"The child will anchor me in time. Give me a sense of things."

"Things. The *usual* things, Sandy. That's the alternative to the Set."

"I'm tired of hearing this."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you know 'Portrait d'une Femme?' '. . . the usual thing: one dull man, dulling and uxorious, one average mind—with one thought less, each year.' You may be condemning yourself to that."

"I won't have just one man, dull or otherwise. And I don't think I want to dance any more." She turned and made her way off the floor; Lamoral followed in clanking armor.

Two Party Set months ago—two decades years realtime?—Sandy had walked out on a rich second husband who'd adored her, been showered with money in the settlement—he wanted her back and was still full of irrational hope—and then gone into the Party Set with Carolly as sponsor while her poor ex floundered hopelessly at the portals, turned down by the Doyenne despite his loot.

Now Sandrea was walking out again.

Maybe, Lamoral thought, he was being persistent only because he couldn't believe this was happening to *him*. Maybe that second husband had been just as surprised.

Sandy spun toward him; her eyes were bright.

"It's the Set that has one thought less each year," she said. "Less and less connection with reality! Fewer real connections even with each other! I want to feel something real for a change!"

"This is real," Lamoral said. "This is really Ariel, that's really Uranus up there. If you step outside the Party Barge without a suit, you'll die."

She looked at him. "The boy's not yours."

"I know."

"You don't have any responsibility here."

"I want you to stay."

"Because you're selfish. We've established that."

"You don't have to have the child. We should establish that as well."

"I won't abort."

"There are alternatives. The boy can be brought to term in an automatic womb, given to foster parents."

"I want something that's *mine!*" Tears were wrecking her elaborate makeup job. "There's nothing here that's *mine!*" Lamoral regretted the lack of a handkerchief in his armor.

It was Carolly who came to the rescue, producing a scrap of lace from inside her Robin Hood hat. "Careful, children," she said. "There are eyes everywhere."

Sandrea blew lustily. "It's my party," she said. "I'll cry if I want to."

Carolly looked suspiciously at Lamoral and then Sandrea, trying to decide who was to blame for all this latest sadness. In the end she took Sandrea's arm and took her off for consolation. Lamoral gave a false, chivalrous smile and bowed farewell. He considered the consolations of homicide.

A Lilt-laughing Miranda approached, and Lamoral spun her out onto the floor. After the orchestra faded away, Lamoral found himself approached by his brother. "Edwardes keeps looking at me and rattling his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rapier," Alex said. "I think he's sung *Otello* too damn often. Desdemona's left the Set, so he's got no one left to murder but me."

"You should be accustomed to jealous swains by now."

"Good grief. It was *years* ago. I'm with Indira now."

"It was only a few weeks ago, our time."

"I wish he'd grow up." Petulantly. "He challenged me to a duel, did I tell you that?"

"I believe you mentioned something of the sort." To anyone who'd listen, in fact.

"On some asteroid or other where it wasn't illegal. Just the two of us, our pistols, and maybe a hundred ships in orbit, all full of gawkers and video cameras."

"I doubt he was serious, Alex. Probably just Lilt talking."

"He's singing tonight." Alex tried to look smug. "I'm going to enjoy hearing the famous voice as it begins to show its age."

Cao Cao appeared, Prospero with a box of cigars. "It's a boy," he said.

Alex took a blue-banded stogie.

"I've got one, thanks," said Lamoral.

"Please have another, 1A."

"I don't smoke much." Wondering if the lisp was affected or whether Cao Cao had actually allowed himself a small imperfection.

"Got to keep those lungs in shape, I suppose." Cao Cao smiled with perfect teeth. "Never know when you're going to take another shot at Changabang."

Lamoral gave earnest mental consideration to how Cao Cao would look bouncing down Changabang's crumbling west wall. But Cao Cao kept turning into Karl-August Hormayr, and Lamoral forced the image from his mind.

Smiling Cao Cao was the son of a Shanghai police sergeant who had retired from the force a multi-millionaire. He had been raised in a picturesque tax haven at Lagrange Point Four, insulated from his father's former associates by a squad of elegantly-dressed and unusually lethal bodyguards. Cao Cao trained in biochemistry and, according to his official biography, invented Lilt, the world's most perfect intoxicant, before his thirtieth birthday. The unofficial grapevine suggested instead that Cao Cao had appropriated the formula from some hapless inventor, who had then perished in some quiet and convenient fashion at the hands of fastidious Chinese hitmen dressed in monochrome tie-and-tails and white doeskin gloves. The old Shanghai connection had proved useful in marketing the stuff, although eventually Lilt, which had fewer drawbacks than any other known consciousness-altering substance, was legalized throughout most of human-inhabited space; and Cao Cao, his business legitimized, sat back to happily collect his royalties and to join the Party Set.

Lamoral gave Cao Cao a smile. "Have you made plans for the boy?"

"Of course." Cao Cao stuck one of his own cigars in his too-handsome

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face. "Trust fund, the works. And a guardian, when Sandy gets tired of having a child around and finds another whim to pursue."

Lamoral absorbed this coldly. With calculation, he broadened his smile. "Planning on sending him into the family business, then?"

Cao Cao's hand, holding a gold lighter, froze for just an instant on its path to the cigar. Cao Cao puffed the cigar into life, then looked up at Lamoral.

"At least my family *has* a business."

And stalked away.

Alex smirked. "Game point, I'd say."

Lamoral watched the retreating Prospero with mixed annoyance and satisfaction. Pity the man hadn't stuck around for set and match: Lamoral had a strong volley and a wicked verbal backhand.

"His facts weren't even correct," he said, principally for the benefit of whatever state-of-the-art eavesdroppers might be lurking beneath the dome. "Our family has *lots* of businesses."

"I hope it was more than a bad stock tip that sent Cao Cao storming off," Kitsune Takami said as she ambled out of the crowd around the bar. She was perhaps the tallest person in the room, having been, among other things, a basketball star. Knowing she would look absurd in a farthingale, she had adopted Elizabethan drag, a fashion kinder to her lanky form. Long blueblack hair poured over a short ruff; a lacy gold pomander hung around her neck on a chain. She wore a ducal crown upon which rioted strawberry leaves made of delicately-fashioned gold.

Alex swept her a bow and kissed her knuckles. "It was a thing of beauty, milady. Lamoral skewered him where it hurts, right in his ancestors."

"Congratulations."

"I'm looking forward to the next engagement."

Kitsune raised the pomander to her nose, took a delicate period sniff. Her eyes followed Cao Cao. "I was afraid it would take murder to get to him, though I confess I couldn't decide who the exact victim should be, Cao Cao or Sandy. But Sandy is doing herself in, or nearly, by leaving the Set, and that simplifies the decision."

"What's your chosen weapon?" Alex seemed delighted by this news. "Knife? Poison?" He leaned closer to her. "A stake through the heart?"

Kitsune smiled. "Words, I think. On reflection I've decided that the best revenge is simply telling the world what I learned about Cao Cao during and subsequent to our . . ." She smiled and took another sniff. "Our little *folie*."

Alex gave a conspiratorial smile. "Though Cao Cao and I have barely been aware of one another on a personal level, I confess having developed an aesthetic objection to his manner of operation. The way he dumped you was simply appalling."

Kitsune looked at him. "An interesting comment, coming from one of the Set's most expert heartbreakers."

"An expert is entitled to criticize the loutish amateurs that cross his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

path. Were you and I, milady," kissing her hand once more, "to become involved, I'd do it with much more grace. You'd have no reason to plot murder. We would probably, in fact, remain good friends."

Kitsune gazed down at Alex with a certain amount of calculation in her eyes.

"No offense, Alex," Lamoral said, "but I'd like to interrupt your hypothetical affaire, if you don't mind, and get straight to the dirt. Cao Cao is probably going to try to counterattack sooner or later, and I'd like to have my salvo ready."

Kitsune retrieved her hand. "Liu Shuyuan," she said.

Lamoral looked at her. "Is that all?"

"Just mention the name. That should do the job nicely."

"Drop the name in Cao Cao's path," Alex said with glee, "and watch him turn pale. If there are any eavesdroppers, they'll be overwhelmed with curiosity."

"There may be eavesdroppers now," said Lamoral.

"If there are," simply, "then they're curious."

"There probably aren't, you know," Kitsune said. "We're so many light-hours from Earth that there's no way the listeners could ever control their devices. They'd have to plant them all over the place, and the crew has had four months to sweep the Barge clean."

"True," Lamoral said. "I hadn't realized." He considered Cao Cao once more. "Any more arrows in your quiver?"

"That one arrow should suffice for the man who once sent Mary Maude Mullen a dog skewered on a spit." Kitsune gave a secret smile. "I'll save the rest for a time when we're absolutely certain no one's listening. I'm quite beside myself anticipating Cao Cao's reaction when he begins to think everyone in the Set knows his secrets."

"He'll know where these bulletins are coming from."

"Some of them, yes, the few he told me about. Others are available to anyone willing to do the research."

"And Liu Shuyuan?"

"Not pillowtalk, my dear. I've had almost three years realtime for my detectives to do their work. Cao Cao has enemies outside the Set, and a lot of them were talkative."

Lamoral was impressed by the thoroughness of Kitsune's work. "I'm surprised they're not all dead. A lot of years have passed on the outside."

"It's precisely because some of them are dead that others can talk." She took another whiff of her pomander. "The triads are fueled by their own mythology, and myths by their nature are transmitted orally. Gangsters can talk about anyone who's dead, or anyone who's become a legend; and Cao Cao, being a member of the Set, shares qualities with both."

Lamoral considered this. "Did you encounter actual evidence of crime? Could Cao Cao end up in jail on account of this?"

Kitsune shook her head. "All myth amounts to is organized hearsay. Nothing verifiable." She gave a smile as cold as the ammonia frost out-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side. "There's just enough to make him acutely uncomfortable so long as he remains in the public eye."

"Drive him out of Set?" Alex smiled. "Magnificent, milady. My congratulations. If I ever find myself forced to break your heart, I will make certain to do it with particular delicacy."

Lamoral left Alex and Kitsune outlining the finish to their as-yet-unrealized relationship and paced back to the bar. Cao Cao compelled to leave the Set? Lamoral was uncertain whether or not that was desirable. It left Cao Cao out in the real world with Sandy.

Years would pass outside, though, before Kitsune's whispering campaign bore fruit, assuming it ever did. Sandy might be ten years older, and Cao Cao would have other things to think about—whether any of his old enemies were still alive, for one thing.

At the bar Lamoral filled his glass with a Trockenbeeren Auslese from his own family vineyards at Rauenthal. Living in the Party Set, a few nights each year, he could still keep track of his vintages. Crisp, he thought as he sipped, rather mellow for a Rhenish. They were going to be paying high prices for this stuff back home. Savoring the wine, he headed for the edge of the dome.

There stood Sandy, her elaborate headdress silhouetted blackly against the pale blue of Uranus. Unger was before her on his knees, clutching her hand. There were tears running out from beneath his video specs. "Will the veiled sister . . ." he began, and his voice drowned in sobs. He began again. "Will the veiled sister between the slender/ Yew trees pray for those who offend her/ And are terrified and cannot surrender . . ."

"Up, Unger." Lamoral wanted to kick him.

"Will the sister." Sobbing again. "Kissed her. Mist her."

Lamoral looked at Sandy. "Let's get out of here."

"It's all right." There was a surprising gentleness in her voice. "He's just drunk."

"He's always drunk."

"But I'm an *honest* drunk," said Unger. He was trying to rise and not succeeding. "An honest drunk *on* an honest drunk. An honest drunk being one you *pay for*. Not like—" One foot gave way and he sprawled Arielward. "Not like what the Mephisto of the triads peddles. Not like that Lilt. With no hangover. No liver-rot. No honest purging." He clutched at the floor; the smooth surface gave him no purchase. "No real feelings at all," he said. "Nothing to keep you sane. Just joy, and then nothing. A fantasy drunk, all air."

"Pass out, Unger," said Lamoral, "and get it over with."

Sandy looked at Lamoral in annoyance. "Help me get him to a chair."

"There is no awe in Lilt," Unger said as Lamoral picked him up like a doll—the light gravity helped—and tried to set him upright. "No grandiosity. No pity or terror. I know I'm pathetic." Unger was weeping again, having changed tacks. He fell in slow motion toward the floor. Lamoral, giving up, let him go. Unger landed on his back and belched. Lamoral became acutely aware of the level of Unger's garlic consumption. "But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pathetic is something real," he said. "It may not be heroic, or tragic, but it's real. Without tragedy, you can have no dimension, and without dimension, no humanity. And there are no tragedies on Lilt." He blinked up at them. "Am I getting through?"

Lamoral looked at Sandy. "It's hopeless," he said. "He wants to be here; let him stay."

"I'll stay with him," Sandy said.

If Lamoral remained another minute he'd strangle someone, though he wasn't certain just who. He headed for the dance floor again, drained his glass, put the glass on the bar. He turned on his video shades, hoping it would brighten his mood. He intended to dance for the next ten hours, then sleep for at least six months.

The orchestra faded out to scattered applause, and people cleared the floor. The orchestra struck up something that was definitely not the prelude to a dance tune. A spotlight picked out Thomas Edwardes. His doublet was unbuttoned and his massive black torso gleamed in the light.

"*Otello* again," said someone. "God, he's in a rut."

"He's singing with a new Lilt these days," said another wag.

Not true. The voice was magnificent, the acting superb. Alex was bound to be disappointed: there wasn't a thing wrong with the voice, no hesitation, no flat notes on the highs, no unexpected diminuendi.

Sweat popped from Otello's broad forehead. He'd just made up his mind to slaughter his bride. His hands clutched convincingly at an invisible throat. Lamoral wondered whose throat the old boy had in mind.

Ora e per sempre addio . . .

Now and forever, Lamoral translated, farewell to peace of mind.

Lamoral hoped to hell this was not an omen.

Lamoral could only trust that the cameras were turned off by the time Robin Goodfellow upchucked into the punch bowl. Well before that the ball had begun to degenerate: Set members jumped to and fro in the low gravity, caroming off the dome and scattering party favors on the mortals below. Though this particular fiesta was supposed to go on for another few "moons"—there would be a different installment of the Party at each of Uranus's satellites—Lamoral decided that he was not having a good time, and that he'd head for the cold bunkers and leave instructions to wake him in time for the Day of the Dead celebration in Guadalajara next November.

Once out from under the dome, he walked through corridors straight off a nineteenth century P&O steamer, all P.O.S.H. The interior corridors were paneled in teak, the carpets were from India, the fixtures were brass, and the cabins featured nautical art on the walls and little brass nameplates on the doors—on Lamoral's was not only his name but his armorial bearings, with the towers and the spitted dog that had so amused Kitsune. The Party Barge was actually the *Queen Mary*, a name that referred to Mary Maude Mullen rather than to any member of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

House of Windsor. The Barge's name was one which Lamoral, for various reasons having to do with pedigree, declined to employ.

Lamoral's cabin was bigger than that of any steamer ever built. Lamoral took off his armor and his video glasses and dropped them on the carpet for the robots to pick up. Cao Cao's forgotten cigar tumbled from the cuirass and rolled on the floor. After he put on the white jumpsuit most Setmen wore into their bunkers, Lamoral drank another glass of the Rauenthal, then picked up the cigar, lit it, and headed for the bunkers.

In the corridor he made a turn and saw Indira Batish just ahead, walking in the same direction. He caught up with her and said hello. She gave him a look; he saw her caste mark was back in place. "When do you next wake?" she asked.

"El Día de Los Muertos."

"I'm waiting for Buddha to descend from the Tishita Heaven on a flight of stairs."

"Where's he doing that?"

"Lhasa. November, I think."

"I may see you there. I've never seen the Buddha walk down from Heaven before."

"I'm not sure he does it publicly."

The sound of voices resonated down the corridor, from the lounge where other Setfolk were waiting for their prep shot to take effect. Lamoral recognized Unger's belching rumble, Edwardes' trained, resonant voice. Indira and Lamoral walked past the lounge to the pre-sleep clinic and looked inside for Jameson, the medic. He wasn't to be seen, though the injector was lying on a table with a box of ampoules beside it. One door, open, led to the lounge; another, closed, to the cold bunkers. Lamoral and Indira returned to the lounge.

"Jameson?" Lamoral saw the medic bent over Wayne Unger, who was lying in apparent comfort on the carpeted floor of the lounge, his video shades still shrouding his eyes. Sitting on the furniture in various postures of languor were Carolly and Kitsune, in identical white jumpsuits, and Edwardes, still in Elizabethan togs with a very modern fluffy towel around his neck.

"In a minute." Jameson offered Lamoral a thin smile. "I've got to talk Mr. Unger into investing in a new liver."

"Convince me it's an honest move," said Unger. "Convince me I'm not cheating my well-deserved fate."

"No one," said Kitsune Takami, obviously bored by this act, "joins the Set to die. If you wanted to shuffle off, you could have done it much more easily just by living on in your own time."

"Just by joining the Set, Unger, you cheat the Reaper," said Edwardes. "You might as well keep on cheating." Lilt kept dragging the corners of his mouth into a smile, though the rest of him was clearly not happy.

"Now that I think about it," Kitsune said, "you've cheated death at least three times. Once when you joined the Set, once when you beat that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

murder rap, once when Moore beat your brains out. No reason not to try for a fourth."

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence.

"Who was it," Carolly wondered, "who said that God looks after drunks, madmen, and the United States of America?"

Finally Unger gave a baffled nod. "A Daniel come to judgment! O wise young judge Kitsune! how I do honor thee!" He waved his arms. "Bring on the new liver. The others may watch the operation if they desire. Perhaps they will be able to discern the future from inspection of my vitals."

"*Your* future," Carolly said, "almost certainly."

Jameson rose from his crouch. "I hope you're going to remember this resolution when you sober up, Mr. Unger." He looked up at Lamoral. "I can't give you your prep, Alex, till you've finished the cigar." He winked at Indira. "The lady I can shoot full of juice any time."

Lamoral had forgotten he wasn't supposed to smoke after taking the prep shot: he didn't smoke often enough for the rule to have made much of an impression on him. He didn't bother to correct Jameson's case of mistaken identity; he merely nodded and returned to the corridor. Indira went with Jameson to get her shot. Lamoral could hear voices fading in and out, moving between the clinic and the lounge.

Lamoral had smoked his cigar halfway when Alex turned a corner and headed toward him. Alex was dressed in the same type of anonymous white jumpsuit Lamoral wore, and was likewise smoking one of Cao Cao's cigars; Alex gave a half-wave as he walked past, then walked in through the clinic door. A few moments later he came out.

"Forgot I couldn't smoke," he said.

"Me, too."

"This party's already boring."

"I agree."

Alex chose a likely spot of wall and lounged against it. Lamoral tapped ash into his hand, Alex onto the carpet. Conversation from the lounge faded in and out. None of it seemed very interesting.

Lamoral's cigar was almost finished when Cao Cao arrived. The chemist's jumpsuit was a custom number, red silk, with silver Chinese characters. Lamoral thought about Liu Shuyuan and gave an inward smile. Pity the exchange wouldn't be recorded.

But Cao Cao just walked past with a nod and a half-smile, then went into the lounge. Lamoral felt a trickle of disappointment.

Oh, well. Next time would be better; there would be recordings.

Alex puffed smoke into the corridor. His voice came out of a gunmetal cloud.

"I think I'll visit Regensburg when we get back."

"It's been a while since you've seen Gloria."

"I'd prefer not to. The depression after such a visit is a pall that lasts far, far too long."

"Family," Lamoral said, and gave him a meaningful look.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alex offered a reluctant nod. "Family," he said. "Very well."

The voices from the lounge dwindled as people made their way to the cold bunkers. Lamoral finished his cigar and walked to the clinic for his shot. "Hi, Alex," Jameson said. "You must be drunker than you look, not remembering about the cigar even after I told you the first time."

Lamoral dumped his cigar ash into the waste and rolled up his sleeve. "I'm not Alex," he said.

Jameson smirked. "Pull the other one," he said.

Jameson put the hypogun to Lamoral's arm, fired it, and made a note in the computer file to that effect. Rolling down his sleeve, Lamoral went back out into the corridor to finish passing the time with Alex. He didn't feel like being shut up in the lounge with Cao Cao.

Alex finished his cigar and went into the clinic for his shot. Time passed. The mild sedative added to the prep shot began to drift slowly through Lamoral's mind. Tension began to ebb away. He and Alex passed their time in silence.

He made his way to the cold bunker, closed his eyes, let the machine do its work.

He would rise from his coffin on the Day of the Dead.

Legions of skeletons danced through his icicle dreams.

There was a different, yet familiar taste to waking. Someone had added Lilt to the formula. His brain, somewhat disconnected from his consciousness, rollicked in ecstacy as warming blood was pumped through his body.

Eventually the pleasure settled down to an energizing background hum. Lungs brought in warm, effervescent air, air that tasted faintly of champagne. Lamoral let the lid hiss back and blinked in reality.

He could tell from the decor that his cold bunker had been moved from the Party Barge back to Bermuda. There was a young woman, in a Party Set jumpsuit, watching him from a chair. He rose.

"Sorry if I bored you," he said. "I must have dozed off for a moment."

She gave a deferential smile. "A little more than a moment, your royal highness," she said, "but that's all right."

"I'm not a Royal," he said, for maybe the thousandth time, "I'm a Serene."

"Oh. Sorry." She seemed flustered. She was pale-skinned and dark-haired, attractive in her own way, but clearly not a candidate for the Set.

"Happens all the time," he assured her. He legged out of the bunker and stood up. He went to the clothing locker and opened it. A red-spotted skull mask looked out at him.

His costume for the Day of the Dead. Well.

"Your serene highness . . ." Uncertainly.

"Call me Lamoral." Smiling over his shoulder. "Everyone does."

"My name is Planter," the young woman said. "I'm here to assist with your new Adjustment."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So soon? I was Adjusted back in January." He pushed the costume aside and looked for appropriate casual wear.

"You've been asleep a little longer than planned," Planter said.

Lamoral's hand froze on a seersucker suit. "The date?" he said.

"October thirty-first."

On time at least, Lamoral thought, for the Day of the Dead.

"Twenty-one Forty-four," Planter finished.

Six years, Lamoral thought. Six years since the Party Set visited Ariel. He spun to face his Adjuster. "Why?" he asked.

"There's been a war. The Party Set decided . . ."

"Where?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Where was the war!" Lamoral clenched his fists.

"Oh. Everywhere. Earth, Luna, the satellites . . ."

"Europe?"

"Not really. Europe was sort of ignored after the Spanish launching facility was occupied by neutral troops." Planter seemed startled by his vehemence. "If you'll just sit down, I can . . ."

"South America?"

"Yes. It was particularly bad there. If you'll . . ."

"North America?"

"Yes. Well, parts." She seemed to have recovered herself; a smoothness had entered her voice. "If you'll sit down, I can bring you up to date and we can talk about . . ."

"I'll need a comm link," Lamoral said. "I'll also need a monitor giving quotes from the London, Tokyo, and New York exchanges."

"You don't have to worry about your investments, sir," Planter said. "The Party Set's Investment Intelligences managed our portfolio very well throughout the conflict."

"I have most of my investments outside the Set."

"Oh." She blinked. "No one told me."

"Just get me to a comm link. And get my brother."

Planter rose from her chair. "Yes. I suppose I can . . . I mean—"

"Just do it."

She resigned herself to her patient remaining maladjusted. "Yes, sir."

Lamoral's younger sister seemed to have aged two decades in the eight or so objective years since he'd seen her. That was always hard to take, seeing her youth vanish in installments, like a subject of time-lapse photography. She was in her sixties now, and had the benefit of the latest life-preservation technology, but still time had clawed her. The horrors of the war she described seemed abstract compared with the ravages made on her face and body, distanced though they were by the oval gold frame of the video screen, one that did double duty as a mirror when it wasn't showing the slightly-unreal outside to the slightly-unreal members of the Set.

"In the old days," Gloria said, "we would have finished off the war in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a year or two. But no one had fought a war in over a century, and we went about it all wrong. All three sides blundered throughout, and finally two blundered into mutual disaster and the third declared victory before the others had the strength to dispute it."

"Who fought?" Lamoral said. "Who won?"

There was a touch of severity in Gloria's flinty eyes. "No one you know, dear."

Alex vented a humorless chuckle. Gloria's eyes flickered across the video screen to him, then back to Lamoral. Behind her was the functional confines of her office in the Schloss St. Emmeram.

"What did it cost?" Lamoral asked.

"Two hundred, three hundred million dead. No one's entirely certain, what with collateral casualties caused by misuse of biologicals and attempts by belligerents to control Earth's weather systems. The numbers seem to have overwhelmed our record keeping."

"I meant," said Lamoral, "how much did it cost *us?*"

Gloria gave a cold smile of recognition. "You don't change, dear."

"I like to take pride in that."

"The South American vineyards and ranches were hard hit. The facilities at the Mato Grosso spaceport were smashed, but are now rebuilding. The cattle in Montana were lost to plague, bad weather, and military action. The Siberian stock were hard hit by disease, but we saved a breeding population. The plantations in Georgia and South Carolina were converted to food production for the duration of the war, but the first winter cash crops have been seeded. Nothing in Europe suffered direct damage, but the freak weather ruined our wine crop two years running. On the whole, things could have been much worse. We are in decent shape, and our family bank is in good condition to take advantage of reconstruction efforts throughout human space."

"And the family?"

"We're all fine." With asperity. "Thank you for asking."

"I should have been there."

"Yes. We rather think so. We tried to get the Party Set to thaw you, but the person who rejoices in the title of *Queen* Mary Maude Mullen had made a policy decision and gone to sleep for the duration, and no one dared overrule her . . ."

Lamoral's knuckles whitened as he gripped his chair arms. "I'll speak to her about that."

Some inner steel struck Gloria's flinty eyes: sparks flashed. "Sue her and the Set instead. That might attract her attention in a way I could not."

"I'll consider it."

"I think you should visit Regensburg very soon, Lamoral. I've got some new grandchildren you should meet."

"Yes. I agree."

"I will transmit data concerning our financial condition."

"Please do. I'll study it as soon as I can."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gloria's image winked away. Lamoral found himself staring into the oval mirror, his twin smirking beside him.

"Wait till you hear the *other* news," Alex said. "They woke me up before you, and I've heard some interesting gossip."

"In a moment, Alex. Computer, I have a query."

"At your service." The computer's androgynous voice came from the mirror, and Lamoral had sometimes wondered how many Setmen had asked it in classic rhyme who was the fairest of all, and what the computer had answered. He had not been vain—or unselfconscious—enough to try it himself.

"Please discover the latest whereabouts of Sandrea Salazar Sedillo, former member of the Party Set."

"One moment, please." The computer actually took about three seconds. "Sandrea Salazar and her son, Miguel, are interred at the Holy Faith Crematorium in Aracaju, Sergipe Province, North Brazilian Protectorate. They were cremated on May 3, 2140."

Lamoral stared at himself in the mirror. Objectively speaking, he thought, and judging from his appearance, he seemed to have suffered a dreadful psychic blow. He tried to smooth the shock out of his face.

"What was the cause of death?" he asked.

"Exposure to Green Monkey Virus 2140-A, rampant in Brazil at that time."

"Thank you, computer."

"At your service."

Lamoral took a breath, let it out. Back to normal, he thought. "Your gossip, Alex?"

Alex shifted in his seat. "I don't think you want to hear it. Not after that."

"Tell me. I may as well have it all at once."

Alex sighed. "One Set member didn't wake up after the party on Ariel. Cao Cao's said his last ciao-ciao."

"Mm. Dreadful pun. And why should the news upset me?"

"He was murdered. They think you probably did it."

"Ah. Thank you, Alex."

"You asked."

"So I did."

Lamoral contemplated his reflection for another few moments. He rose. "Time to speak to the Doyenne," he said.

Lamoral had spoken at length to Mary Maude Mullen only once, when he was interviewed for Set membership. Before the interview, he had made inquiries and known what to expect: rows of china dogs, a blazing fire, a peremptory old woman.

Still, on his actual arrival, the concreteness of the study with its endless shelves of porcelain dogs and the enormous fireplace was a bit unsettling, a reminder that from this point on, things were going to grow increasingly unreal. Every single angel is terrible, he thought (quoting Rilke). And

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this was the abode not of the Angel of Death, but of Life. Which made it more terrifying than anything Rilke had imagined.

The Doyenne, behind her Victorian desk, wore a faintly Edwardian broad-shouldered gown with multiple strands of pearls circling her neck and draping her bosom. With her hair up she looked like Queen Alexandra—either the Russian or the British, take your pick.

A piece of anachronism, he concluded, a part of the self-created legend. Mary Maude had flourished in the Roaring Twenties, one of London's Bright Young Things. Now, with all that over a century away, she was milking her nineteenth century birth for everything it was worth. Someone had told Lamoral that she quoted Tennyson as if she'd heard him read idylls in the family parlor.

He studied the pastel dogs. Pinks and greens predominated.

"Do you like my doggies?" she said. Her voice was stronger and far more abrasive than he'd expected.

"They're in ghastly taste," he said. "I assume it's not your own. A useful metaphor, however."

"On your family arms," she said, "there's a dog on a spit."

Lamoral was pleased that he didn't take the bait and glance at the fireplace. "Another metaphor, I suppose," he said. "May I sit down?"

Her glare was colder than the liquid nitrogen that flooded the Set's cold bunkers.

"If you insist," she said.

He took the chair nearest and nudged it a closer to the desk. Heat from the fireplace beat on his profile. He hoped he wasn't about to sweat: that would create the wrong impression entirely.

She was looking at him closely. "Why should someone like Lamoral Johannes Miguel Albert Maria Gabriel, the Inheritor-Prince von Thurn und Taxis, want to join the Party Set?"

Lamoral smiled thinly. "There *is* no one like me, to my knowledge."

"You're a good dancer."

"So I'm told."

"Answer my question."

He was tempted to say, *I just did.* Instead he pretended to give his answer a degree of mature consideration.

"I think the Set would look good on me."

The Doyenne came right back at him. As a boxer, he thought, she'd have a terrific jab. "You evade me, young man. It does you little good."

"Very well." He affected further thought. "I find my family obligations somewhat lacking in challenge. It would be different if I'd actually inherited a country, I suppose, like my cousins the Liechtensteins, but estate and money management palls after a while. I've given up climbing rocks—all the good ones were first climbed long ago, anyway. The Party Set is the sort of thing I'd be doing anyway, only without the advantage of fast-forwarding through the more tedious parts of existence."

"Can you give it up? The family, the traditions, all dozen or so of your castles?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All twenty-three, to be precise. And no, I have no intention of giving it all up."

"You'll have to."

"I think not. After all, I'll have to resign and produce an heir at some point."

She fixed her legendary scowl on him. Lamoral avoided being intimidated. "For a member of the Party Set, there *is* no other existence. There is no choice in the matter. Any occupation outside the Set becomes irrelevant—one's family ties crumble away, one's specialized knowledge becomes obsolete, one's occupation ceases to exist."

Lamoral gave her a practiced smile. "I'd like to think of my occupation as timeless."

"You'll see," she said darkly. By which Lamoral took it to mean he'd been accepted.

As he knew he would, even if he'd spent his interview gnawing on human bones. The Party Set, a *nouveau* media aristocracy, would have happily slit a thousand throats for a hint of validation from the *Landadel*, and both he and the Doyenne knew it.

"You'll have to take my brother Alexander as well," he said.

"I hardly think so. More than one member of a family is quite—"

He gave her his most charming smile. "He'll just get into trouble without me to look after him. No, it's both of us, I'm afraid."

And both of them it was. Alex's interview was no less *pro forma* than his own.

He hadn't told the Doyenne that he'd yet to talk Alex into applying, however.

Afterwards, when he and Alex were informed about the Set's custom of presenting gifts to the Doyenne following one's acceptance, they knew at once what to do. The matched set of porcelain dogs were cast in Dresden to careful instructions.

Both china dogs, like those on the Thurn und Taxis arms, were run through with spits, then set in model fireplaces resembling the Doyenne's own.

No sense, thought the two new Set members, in letting anyone forget exactly who was doing favors for whom.

"Mr. von Thurn and, ah—" The stocky black man wore cotton casuals and tennis shoes, but even so his demeanor said *cop*. Lamoral and Alex had encountered him on their way to the Doyenne's office.

"Lamoral. I really don't have a surname."

"Von Thurn and Taxis isn't your name?" The detective's face didn't change expression. So far as Lamoral could tell, the man didn't even blink.

"It's the name of my—forgive me—dynasty. Like the Battenberg-Windsors. They don't have surnames either."

"I see." The expression stayed the same.

"It's very inconvenient, actually." Lamoral decided he might as well

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spin it out as far as he could, at least till he got some feeling for whether this man was going to do his best to slam him in prison for something he didn't do. "There's really no intermediary degree of formality between 'Lamoral' and 'highness.' " He smiled. "You'll just have to decide how well we're to be acquainted, and use whatever name suits."

The flesh around the man's eyes twitched. He still hadn't managed to blink. "Your highness," he said, "I'm Detective-Superintendent Helmsley of the Bermuda Serious Crimes Unit."

This was going to be difficult, Lamoral decided. The man wasn't easy. "Pleased to meet you," he said. "This is my brother Alexander."

"Why don't you just call us 'Prince,' rather than 'your highness,' " Alex said. "It's quicker."

Helmsley appeared to take this under advisement. "You've heard why I'm here?"

"I believe we have some idea."

"I'd like to ask you both some questions, if I may."

"As you like."

"Miss Mullen has insisted on being present during all questioning. Along with an attorney for the Party Set."

"Very well."

"Prince Lamoral, I think I'd best take you first."

"Certainly, superintendent."

He led them down the humming corridors of the Hall of Sleep, knocked on the door to the Doyenne's office, then opened without waiting for permission. The lower orders, Lamoral thought, had grown cheeky since the dear old Queen's day.

Helmsley hesitated in the doorway, looked at Lamoral and frowned. "Isn't it Mountbatten-Windsor?" he asked.

"They'd like to think so," Lamoral said, entering.

"My brother," explained Alex, "is a traditionalist."

Helmsley closed the door in his face.

Lamoral settled into a chair. He noticed that his dog and Alex's had been set atop the heavy mantelpiece, and assumed this was not because they were the Doyenne's favorites. Perhaps she used them to gauge candidates' reactions.

Perhaps she'd been using them to demonstrate to Helmsley Lamoral's violent and unpredictable state of mind.

After mentioning that the interview was being recorded, Helmsley began his interrogation. Lamoral saw no recorder. All questions concerned who was in the clinic and lounge about the time Cao Cao was getting his prep shot. Helmsley did not concern himself with motives, passions, or relationships. He asked every question several times, phrasing each differently, so as to discover any contradictions. The detective never blinked once. At the end he said thank you, and he and Lamoral rose from their chairs.

"I would like to speak with you after the superintendent talks to Alexander," said the Doyenne.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And I, you," Lamoral said.

"I will send for you."

Lamoral left the Hall of Sleep and walked out into green, palm-bedecked Bermuda. Set members sat at tables beneath bright umbrellas and sipped drinks that came similarly equipped. Weathered statuary frowned down at them. People frolicked in a salt-water pool with tame dolphins and each other. Several had retained their video shades and were fiddling with them, enhancing Bermuda with technicolor effects. There was a noticeable decrease in the conversational volume as Lamoral stepped onto the verdant lawn. He stepped to the oyster-shaped bar and ordered grapefruit juice.

Carolly approached him. She was wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat over her dark red hair and had perched huge sunglasses on her nose. Her sleeveless sundress was covered with bright splashes of batik.

"Spoken to Helmsley yet?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Did my name come up?"

He sipped grapefruit juice. "Fresh," he said gratefully. "Sweet. Wonderful."

"Thank you for the compliments, dear. But you didn't answer my question."

Lamoral began strolling toward the tables. "Your name arose once or twice."

"I was wondering if he crossed my name off the list of suspects."

"I think mine is still near the top of the list, if that's what you want to know."

Carolly slid her shades farther down her nose. Revealed, her eyes held a speculative cast. "Did you do it, Lamoral?" she asked.

"Do what?"

Carolly frowned. Her shades masked her eyes once more.

She and Lamoral arrived at her table. A young woman sat thereat, stunningly attired in a bathing costume in which schools of ambulatory tropical fish, imprisoned somehow beneath its plastic exterior, seemed to provide most of the opaque content. The feat seemed impossible, insofar as the suit itself seemed less thick than the schools of fish swimming inside of it.

"I won't ask," Lamoral said.

"Thank you. Answering is getting to be a bore."

"Lamoral," said Carolly, "this is Eurydike Ichimonji-Apostolidis."

Her hair was black as the rings of Uranus. Her eyes were masked by tortoiseshell shades. Lamoral rather approved of the classic lines of her nose. "Pleased to meet you," he said. "Are you a new member of the Set, or tragically some Adjustor or other?"

"The former." Eurydike sipped an exotic rum drink with one hand and twirled its spiral-decorated umbrella with the other.

"Eurydike has done something clever in the sciences," Carolly said, "but I'm afraid I don't understand precisely what."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I discovered an *n*-dimensional content to the structure of certain Penrose-tile crystals," Eurydike said. From the way she rattled it off, Lamoral had the impression she'd given this speech a lot in recent days. "This allows access to a hyperdimensional fold within some materials."

"You can hide things inside of other things that wouldn't normally be able to hold them," Lamoral said.

Eurydike nodded. "Very good."

"I have an example," admiring the fish, "right before me."

"Eurydike," Carolly said, "has been a Set member for three days."

"It's been interesting," Eurydike said, "though I hardly expected to find myself in a nest of murderers."

"Rest easy by all means," Carolly said. "We don't kill people until we know them well."

"As long as we're on the subject," Lamoral said, "how was Cao Cao done in, exactly? Helmsley concentrated all his questions on the night of the Uranus party. How can he know it was done then? There've been years in which to stake the man."

"It wasn't a stake, dear." Carolly helped herself to Lamoral's grapefruit juice. "Someone made sure that Cao Cao's prep shot contained nothing but a saline solution."

"Ah. I see."

A twofold problem exists with regard to freezing human tissue: solidifying water expands outward, rupturing cell walls; and those cells that survive undamaged tend to die of oxygen starvation during the warming process. The prep shot solved both difficulties by adding an enzyme that altered the way in which water formed ice crystals, making them more compact and less rigid, and also by providing an amino acid which entered each cell and modified it so as to chemically store oxygen for the long winter.

Lamoral thought about this for a moment. "At least he felt no pain," he said.

Carolly smiled. "I'd prefer to think otherwise. Think about it: every cell in the man's body was squeezed slowly by forming ice crystals. Perhaps his last moments were agony."

"Perhaps."

Eurydike looked from one to the other. "Are all Set conversations so gruesome? I've been hearing nothing but this sort of speculation since Cao Cao failed to rise on schedule yesterday morning."

"Rarely has a Set member been so comprehensively disliked," Carolly explained. "Visualizing his death was an occupation of so many that his shuffling off will doubtless leave many of us with a lot of extra time on our hands."

"I doubt it," said Lamoral. "All that time and more will be occupied trying to figure out who did it."

Carolly looked uncomfortable. "I'm not looking forward to being the subject of *that* sort of scrutiny." She looked over one shoulder. "I didn't like the way Helmsley looked at me. I have the impression he doesn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

care about any of us, doesn't care to know us. Do you suppose he'll settle for just anybody?"

"I expect the Party Set's clout will make him cautious. I did find it disturbing that he doesn't blink, however."

"Doesn't blink?" Eurydike finished her drink. "He's probably had his eyes replaced with implants, and his inner ears as well. Everything he sees or hears is recorded."

"Ah. That answers the mystery."

"One of them, anyway." Eurydike rose from her chair. "I'll leave you to continue your necrophilic speculation. I've been listening to this for two days now, and I'm no longer in the mood."

Lamoral rose with her. "I apologize," he said. "The prospect of death concentrates one's mind wonderfully, to misquote Dr. Johnson, but he neglected to mention that it bores the hell out of everyone else."

"Some other time, then. After you're no longer a suspect." Eurydike stuck out her hand, and Lamoral shook it once, in the French manner. He sat and looked at Carolly, who was watching Eurydike's retreating form.

"Interesting," she said. "Genius plus beauty plus an *n*-dimensional swimsuit. What will they come up with next?"

"Sandy's dead," said Lamoral. "And the boy."

"I know," Carolly said. There was a silence. Then, "I was trying to think of a way to tell you."

"I'm sorry Cao Cao's dead." Lamoral realized he was speaking with utter sincerity. "It deprives me of the pleasure of doing him in myself."

Like a cloud drifting over the sun, silence returned and deepened. Lamoral saw Alex wandering out of the Hall of Sleep. The Doyenne was presumably free. Lamoral stood and pushed back his chair.

"Time to confront the dragon," he said.

"I hope Wayne Unger did it," the dragon said. "That would simplify things. Cao Cao's death would therefore not be the Set's fault; it would be the fault of the authorities who failed to deal with Unger the first time."

"I didn't see Unger outside just now."

"He hasn't been revived yet. His interrogation comes next."

"I wish Helmsley luck getting a coherent story out of him."

Mary Maude Mullen donned a black glove and fed a hefty log into the fire. She had surprising strength, Lamoral observed, for someone of her subjective age. "He won't get much of anything," she said. "People were moving between the clinic, the waiting room, and the cold bunkers continually. Anyone who knew his way around the clinic could have replaced the cartridge of prep solution with a similar cartridge of saline from the cabinets." She turned back to her chair, peeled off the glove. "No," she said. "For a variety of reasons, none of them concerned with the truth, it *needs* to be Unger."

"Unger," said Lamoral, "doesn't have much of a motive."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He didn't have much of a motive for killing the first time."

"I understood it to be a *crime passionel*."

The Doyenne gave Lamoral a sour look. "Unger has no passions, unless you count his rather pathetic variety of self-loathing. His life might be considered a *search* for passion, if you like." She lowered herself heavily into her chair; her face was set in an expression of distaste. "He didn't kill that silly woman because he loved her, he killed her because he couldn't. He wanted her to fulfill his life by giving it meaning, and it wasn't possible, and the only way the thing could have meaning at all was if he turned it into a tragedy. And of course he failed even at *that*—the laws wouldn't let anyone stay dead, even him."

"That was all a bit before my time." He remembered hearing about the murder, on a radio broadcast, while camped with Alex and Karl-August Hormayr and the others at Olympus Mons Base Camp II. "It gives one occasion," he said, "to wonder about the state of the current laws."

"There have been hundreds of millions killed in a war. People are still dying of various plagues here and there, places where we can't stage Parties for a while. One more death won't be cause for sorrow—if the authorities can find a murderer, they'll kill him."

Lamoral leaned back in his chair and regarded her. "Would that satisfy you?"

"Of course not!" Her look was savage. "The Party Set reflects the world's desire for a perfect, objective guarantor of taste and excellence; and its makeup reflects my own discrimination! A murder within the Set—within *my* Set—casts doubt upon its foundation. *Two* murders and we'll have people saying that the Party Set is nothing but a breeding ground for malignant and violent psychosis!"

"And is it?"

"Don't be absurd!" She slammed a hand on the table. "The entire *world* has just gone through a mass psychosis! The Set is the epitome of sanity by comparison."

Anger rolled in him. He cocked an eye at her. "I slept through that psychosis," he said. "By your order."

"It was the decision of the Board."

"I'm told it was yours."

"The Board chose to act on my analysis."

Lamoral leaned forward, glowering. "I should have spent the war with my family."

There was an expression of malignant triumph on her face. "Set members have no family but the Set."

"That is quite incorrect in my case, as you know. And most of my money is outside the Set, as you also know. I would have wished in such a crisis to make the family decisions necessary—"

"Young man." The Doyenne's tone was peremptory. "I informed you in your first interview that you would have to give it all up. If you chose to think that you could somehow outsmart time, it is no fault of mine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

Neither was it my decision where you left your funds. Our Investment Intelligence is perfectly capable—"

"Of losing millions in the Crash of 2130. My own I.I. did very well in that, by the way."

"Any investors have long since been compensated."

"As I hope I will be."

Her eyes flashed again. "For *what*, young man?"

"If I discover that, due to this neglect to consult me on my wishes during the crisis, not to mention the decision not to awaken me on the date of my choice, I or my family have been injured in any way, I and any other injured parties I can locate will bring the Party Set to court for damages. The lawsuit may be lengthy, indeed futile, but the publicity that it, and I, will generate, will be more than you can afford."

Mary Maude Mullen listened to this with an expression of intent calculation. When she spoke it was, to Lamoral's surprise, without hint of malice. "I would not make any more enemies, your serene highness."

"I wasn't aware that I had any."

"I've sat here for the better part of two days listening to the various witnesses describe the events surrounding Cao Cao's demise. It is possible to draw a number of interesting conclusions. It has not occurred to you that Cao Cao may have caught the saline bullet meant for you?"

Lamoral stared at her.

"When you stuck your head in the lounge door with Cao Cao's cigar in your blond mug—" An expression of cold satisfaction trickled across the Doyenne's face. Lamoral assumed the trickle was quite deliberate: for a moment, he loathed her for her enjoyment of this. "—your presence in the prep shot queue was announced to everyone in the room. Anyone could have put the saline cartridge in the hypogun, assuming you'd be next to use it. Cao Cao's arrival, before you finished your cigar, might have been just his bad luck."

Lamoral's mind spun, but he managed to narrow the eddies into a very precise pattern. "And Jameson thought I was Alex . . ."

"And if the murderer couldn't tell you apart from your twin either, then it might have been your brother who was the intended target, yes."

"Who'd kill Alex?" The question had to be asked. "And who'd kill me?"

"I suggest you give the matter some thought." She served up a thin-lipped smile. "I can eliminate certain people from your thoughts. Sandrea Salazar, for example, was never near the clinic that night: she continued the party on Titania and Oberon, in front of many witnesses, before she went to her cold bunker."

"Good."

"And Cao Cao's former associates seem out of the picture. We have investigated our staff, and the crew of the *Queen Mary*, most thoroughly. There isn't a hint of any corruption, and in any case none of them were near the clinic."

"There's Jameson."

"Jameson, my dear, was born two centuries ago. He had no connection

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the triads then, and has had little opportunity to form one since. Furthermore, unlike any of the others, he was scarcely out of anyone's sight."

"He could have done it right in front of them. Just taken a cartridge of saline and slotted it into the hypogun. No one would have looked at—at whatever's written on the cartridges. You didn't have to be a member of a triad to dislike Cao Cao."

She beamed at him. Lamoral found the expression a mildly hallucinatory simulacrum of goodwill that was, in its way, terrifying, somewhat like a smile from Tenniel's Duchess. "Very good, my dear," the Doyenne said, "you're beginning to think. Keep it up."

Lamoral gave her an appraising look. "I must say I find it remarkably generous of you, passing on these warnings to someone who just threatened to sue you out of your job."

"It would not do my Party Set the slightest bit of good if you or Alex, or some bystander, were assassinated by whoever it was that killed Cao Cao."

"You know," affecting consideration, "I'm beginning to sympathize with your desire to frame Wayne Unger."

The Doyenne's benevolence faded instantly. Her hand slammed the desk again. "I don't want to frame him! I want the real killer, and I want him out of the Set! I just thought it would be . . . convenient . . . should Unger take the fall."

"You don't think he did it."

"My opinions don't matter."

"You don't think he did it, or we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Her head tilted slightly to one side; her eyes narrowed. It had the appearance of an affectless gesture learned in youth, in 1920s Mayfair or Belgravia; it looked somewhat odd on a would-be Edwardian matron. "Your analysis," she said, "is not altogether without merit."

A kind of joyless mirth bubbled coldly in Lamoral's heart. "You want me to find out who did it."

"You have a good mind, and you are not entirely without resources. You are also motivated by a degree of self-interest. Of course," nodding, "you and your brother could also leave the Set, which would put you safely out of danger."

"Safely out of danger to the Set, anyway."

"A good mind. As I said. Of all my hounds and bitches, you are perhaps the most promising. Pity you never found anything with which to occupy yourself . . ."

Lamoral looked at the fireplace poker and decided that he wanted to take it in hand and smash every china dog in the place. Perhaps, he thought deliberately, he some day would.

"I want to know why Cao Cao was admitted to the Set," he said.

"He was charming, wealthy, polite." This was too glib, Lamoral thought. "He was an interesting man, an inventor."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tell me the real reason, Doyenne. His background alone made him unsuitable, and you know it."

She scowled, an expression far less frightening than her smile. "He had a lot of stock in the Party Set."

"So have others who've never got in."

Mary Maude Mullen gave a sigh. "Our I.I. was totally outfoxed during the Crash of 2130. Our finances were . . . tottering. Cao Cao's financial resources were enormous. It's one of the world's great fortunes."

"He bailed you out."

"Exactly." She looked grim. "It won't happen again. It was the one exception I've made in all these decades, and this disgrace has resulted."

A bell gently chimed. Mary Maude Mullen lifted her chin. "Yes, computer."

"Doyenne, Mr. Unger has been awakened. Superintendent Helmsley wishes to interrogate him as soon as possible."

"Tell him he may come at any time. Inform the legal staff as well."

"As you wish, Doyenne."

Lamoral rose. "I'll give this all due thought, Miss Mullen."

"I hope you will."

Lamoral had one thought already fixed in mind. He headed for the comm link.

"How's our liquidity?" Lamoral asked.

Gloria considered it. "Not as bad as it once was. We have enough capital for the odd venture or two."

"I was thinking of acquiring more Party Set stock."

"It's a solid investment. But we already have a substantial bloc in our portfolio."

"But not a controlling interest."

Gloria's eyes glittered. "I see."

"Have we the funds available?"

"No. Of course not. We would need partners."

Lamoral gave it some thought. "The time hasn't come to go public with the scheme, not even discreetly. But let us buy stock, yes. Through the bank, our companies, the family . . . as many blinds as possible."

"Very well."

"The price will drop shortly, if it hasn't already. Certainly within twenty-four hours."

"Yes?" Gloria was interested.

"I don't have time right now to explain why. But have the I.I. monitor the stock. You'll know when to buy."

"This scheme won't be easy."

Lamoral looked at her and gave her a tiger smile. "I have all the time I need, don't I?"

"I hope I live to see it, Lamoral. That queen bitch dethroned."

"And her pack of dogs with her."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gloria seemed bemused. "You shall have to explain that remark to me sometime, Lamoral."

"I will. In Regensburg."

"You're coming soon? I'll tell the family."

"At the very least," laughing, "we'll make a lot of money."

"Never," said Gloria, "is that a small consideration."

Lamoral found the rest of the Party Set in the auditorium going through part of their Adjustment, in this case a video bringing them up to date on contemporary history.

The Set was not a good audience for this sort of fare. They chatted, laughed, moved from seat to seat. The Adjustors, having no choice, put up with it all, but broadcast their scowling disapproval from the lectern. Lamoral found Carolly sitting next to Eurydike and joined them.

"What have I missed?" Lamoral asked.

Carolly looked at her watch. "About the first fifty million casualties."

Soldiers exploded from shuttles in jittery verité images. Projectiles chopped chunks out of concrete and, occasionally, people. The Mato Grosso spaceport, in the background, was burning.

Lamoral looked at the carnage with interest. "I believe my family's about to lose a substantial investment. I hope to hell we're insured."

Rockets hammered concrete. A landing web toppled.

"And to think," said Eurydike, "that we slept through it all."

Lamoral looked at her. Her eyes, uncovered by sunglasses, had a pleasant Eurasian tilt. The startling bathing suit had gone: she was wearing a simple cotton shift. "You slept through it?" Lamoral asked. "I thought you'd joined the Set only a few days ago."

"I saw what was coming. When it looked as if things were going to oscillate out of control, I retired to my own cold bunker in the Apostolidis complex in Mexico City."

"Sensible of you."

"Events were cascading into a chaos of classic dimensions. You could chart it with a Lorenz equation if you wanted."

"And didn't someone? Wouldn't that have provided a warning?"

She shrugged and gave him a weak smile. "Who listens to mathematicians?"

"Ah."

"Events were too complex. None of the major powers in space wanted to fight: they were all dragged into it by their allies, here on Earth and elsewhere. Whenever the space powers settled things between themselves, their allies would start fighting in some backwater like Canada or Ceres, settling old scores, and the powers got dragged back in again."

"Like the First World War."

"More like the Peloponnesian. World War I was pretty linear once it got going. The Peloponnesian—seen as mathematics, it was entirely nonlinear. Chaos. The big winner was Persia, which didn't even do any fighting."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And who's the winner here?"

"Radical technologies, probably. By the end, every technology held back by our peaceful, conservative order got deployed by the powers."

"And those technologies are?"

"I bet this video won't tell us. It seems pretty superficial to me."

"Good God," said Carolly. "Was that the Kremlin?"

Lamoral looked up at the screen. "Built of wood, unfortunately."

"I hope they got some of the treasures out."

They watched until the images from Russia were replaced with the sight of robot hunter-killer tank units storming across the Gobi in vast clouds of dust. The strange thing was that they appeared literally from nowhere, from out of a barnlike structure, like a host of clowns from out of a midget car.

Lamoral stared. "Did you do that?" he asked Eurydike.

Her expression was stolid. "I'm afraid I did."

Carolly seemed puzzled. "If you can hide the contents of an aquarium in a bathing suit," Lamoral explained, "imagine what you can do with a house and an armored brigade."

Carolly was impressed.

"I've changed my mind," Eurydike said. "The big winner in this war was the Party Set."

"How so?" asked Carolly.

"We missed it all. In a war, that's the definition of victor."

After the history lesson came a fashion show. The Party Set watched this part of Adjustment with rather more attention. Lamoral strolled toward Alex and sat down next to him.

"We have a problem," he said.

"Yes?"

Lamoral told him. Alex listened with a mildly amused expression. Lamoral finished, and Alex gave a little frown as he watched a mannequin bounce down the runway in a zoot suit with lapels as wide as the shoulders and the pleated trousers pegged up to the armpits. "You're not going to put that jacket on *me*," Alex said.

"I suspect you're not being given a choice in the matter."

Alex sighed. "Do you really think it's true? Or was it the Doyenne trying to get a bit of revenge?"

"I don't know. I've been too surprised by the idea to give it much rational thought."

"Besides—who'd kill *you*, Lamoral? I can't think of a soul."

"I wish I could say the same for you, Alex."

Alex affected surprise. "You mean Edwardes? The business with Helen Nomathemba was *years* ago."

"The Party Set," Lamoral said, "necessarily has somewhat flexible attitudes with regard to time. He did challenge you to a duel, for god's sake, and dueling's *centuries* out of fashion."

Lamoral's eyes drifted to Thomas Edwardes, who sat in the last row

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the auditorium where he could gaze down at everyone, brooding above the entire Party Set. He looked as if he had a lot to brood about. Maybe he was working up to another murderous aria.

"But really," Alex protested. "It's *too* absurd."

"*Ora e per sempre addio* . . . He sang it with great conviction."

"I thought his voice was very clearly not what it was. All his conviction came from Lilt." Alex shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Kill me over a woman? Ridiculous."

"She left the Set after you left her."

"The *last* murder in the Set was over a woman. Edwardes would never be so unfashionable as to provide Unger with a chorus. He'd demand his own aria, at least."

"As I recall, he sang it."

"Pish." There was another man on the runway. His suit was silver mesh and had fins on the shoulders. There was a lightning bolt on his chest and a cowl that masked the upper half of his face.

"If we're going to start talking about affairs of the heart," Alex said, "you're just as guilty as I am."

"I didn't seduce Edwardes' girlfriend away from him."

"What about Carolly? You and she have a history."

"We've remained the best of friends."

"Why did she join the Set, Lamoral?"

"The usual reason, I suppose. It happened well before my time."

"That's part of my point. She was a very well-known actress, you know. But when actresses get to a certain age, parts get harder to find."

Lamoral was annoyed. "Are you serious about this?"

"And then you took up with her protégée, a much younger woman. D'you think Carolly isn't sensitive about things like that?"

Lamoral regarded his brother coldly. "You are growing offensive, Alex."

"Sorry." Alex's expression was smug. "But I'm just proposing a scenario that's just as likely as . . ."

"It's not likely at all."

"Stop turning royal on me. I think the Doyenne's done this deliberately. I think she's trying to keep us from . . . well, from thinking about what we'd otherwise be thinking about."

"If that's what she's trying to do," Lamoral said, "she hasn't succeeded."

"I'm pleased."

The superhero walked off, replaced by a woman who came out dressed as a cartoon mouse, with round ears and big yellow shoes. Some of the audience tittered.

"If the Set tries to get me to wear any of this," Alex said, "I'm going to sleep till the next war."

"I think the Set is going to be a big hit in the next decade or so," Lamoral said. "Fantasy is obviously going to be very popular following the years of war."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Provided, of course, we don't start imitating the outside and slaughtering each other. Our ratings would drop for sure."

Lamoral couldn't tell if Alex were being serious or not.

On reflection, Lamoral considered, he'd always had that problem.

"Am I mistaken," said Kitsune Takami, "or does the waiter have an extra pair of arms?"

"It would appear so," said Lamoral.

"If it's a disability, I suppose I should ignore it, or offer my sympathies," Kitsune said. "But suppose he had it *done* and expects compliments?"

Lamoral inspected the waiter at a distance. He hulked above the Set members, taller than most, wide as a beer truck. His bald head, with its flattened features, looked less a human feature than a grotesque helmet. "Considering his size and fierce mien," Lamoral said, "I wouldn't care to make the wrong choice."

"Exactly."

The Party Set were going through the usual post-Adjustment dance. Bermuda was virtually under seige: politicians and celebrities were fully prepared to cut one another's throats for an invitation to the first Set function in six years, even though none of the Adjustment activities were supposed to be recorded and the dance was, as far as Set functions went, strictly off the record.

"Dance?" Lamoral offered.

"Of course." She smiled. "They'll think we're murderers conspiring together."

Kitsune's ball gown consisted of a single strap, about three inches broad and black in color, wound carefully about her lanky body. She was in glass heels that made her even taller. Glitter dusted her cheekbones and shoulders. Lamoral, classically formal in his dinner jacket, was uncertain where it was safe to place his hands.

"Don't worry," Kitsune said. "It won't shift."

"I'll take your word for it."

The music was slow and soothing, intended as a complement to a perfect Bermuda evening. Steel drums plonked off the deliberately corroded marble façade of the pseudo-Roman amphitheater. Lamoral noticed that some of the orchestra were playing more than one instrument, with more than one set of arms.

"I think compliments are in order for the waiter. Sporting an extra pair of arms seems to be a coming fashion."

"I think I'll pass on that one. I get enough stares on account of my height."

Kitsune's evening strap seemed not to be shifting. Lamoral could feel the warmth and texture of her skin through it. He offered his congratulations.

"Some new miracle adhesive. Developed in the war."

"Isn't it painful when you remove it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There's a solvent. It'll also dissolve on its own, in a few hours, in case I forgot to bring my little spray bottle."

"Leaving you like a kind of reverse Cinderella. In glass slippers and nothing else."

Kitsune seemed amused. "I imagine the designer must have had something like that in mind."

"Do you have a similar costume for the Day of the Dead?"

"I don't think I'll be attending. It might be considered bad taste, with the war and all."

"I'd like to see what the world is like. Six years was too long to be so completely out of touch."

"The world is the same as it was, only worse. I can't say I'm intrigued."

The dance came to an end. Lamoral escorted Kitsune off the floor. Waiting on the fringes were a ranked host of guests—the "normal" people the Set were supposed to mix with as part of Adjustment—all lurking in ambush for the next dance with Kitsune. "The dance ended before I could ask you about Liu Shuyuan," he said.

"It doesn't matter any more, does it?"

"I suppose not. But we were going to be murderers conspiring, weren't we?"

"True." She hesitated on the fringe of the dance floor. A man in the front of the pack—Lamoral recognized the President of the Bank of Bermuda—took a hesitant step forward, then back. Then give a self-conscious Lilting laugh.

"Was Liu the man who developed Lilt?" Lamoral asked.

Kitsune shook her head. "No. That rumor proved not to be true, or at least not true in its more sensational dimensions. The man you mean was Carlos Vandermeer. He and Cao Cao worked together, Vandermeer under contract, and rather than bump him off as per legend, Cao Cao gave him a small fortune and set him up in a perfectly legitimate business in Bali, where he prospered and lived happily ever after."

"Another legend shattered."

The band began to play. The bank president made another hesitant little shuffle.

"Liu was a genuine skeleton in Cao Cao's closet," Kitsune said. "He was Cao Cao's maternal uncle. When the family relocated to L4, he got left behind and, uh, snuffed."

"Is that all?"

"They could have saved him."

The pack, led by the bank president, was inching closer. Lamoral gave them a sympathetic look requesting patience.

"You see," Kitsune said, "they left him behind deliberately, and they put the word out he was responsible for a lot of the family's decisions. The triads got their pound of flesh that way. And when you consider how people in that part of the world feel about family loyalty, you can see it would be a major source of embarrassment to Cao Cao to have all this known, yes?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I see."

"I had more information, don't worry. A veritable banquet. Liu was just the first appetizer." She sighed. "Pity I won't get to serve up the full meal."

"You'll have to tell me dessert sometime."

"Certainly. Perhaps the best analogous dessert would be Chocolate Death, *n'est-ce pas?*"

With a gesture, Lamoral relinquished Kitsune to the mob. "Thank you," he said, stepping out of the way to avoid getting trodden on. "I'll look forward to the banquet, even if it's a vicarious one."

She nodded and surrendered herself to the bank president. Lamoral shortly found himself dancing with a self-conscious deb whose awkwardness was compensated by a very nice smile, at least once he got her smiling. After the dance he escorted her to the bar and left her with a drink and its tiny batik parasol. Heading back, he noticed Wayne Unger on his way to the bar. Unger saw the four-armed waiter nearby, closer than the bar, at which point Unger lurched for the drink tray and helped himself to a pair of martinis.

"Careful, Unger," Lamoral said, approaching. "You haven't got the new liver yet."

Unger was watching the waiter's receding back. "It can't be the DT's. I've barely started."

"My last dance partner informed me," Lamoral said, "that what you're looking at is a genuine space commando. The extra arms are to assist with warfare in the weightless dimension."

Unger gave a shudder, then quaffed the first martini. He looked around for someplace to set the empty glass, saw none, and amiably chucked the glass toward a replica of an Easter Island statue. It bounced off the statue's tiny torso and rolled on the grass.

"He's only a few years old," Lamoral went on. "Grew up in a tank and got force-fed his education via electrode. Now the war's over the few surviving warriors have been demobbed and set free to search for gainful employment."

"Mighty broadminded of the Party Set to hire him," Unger said. "I had always hoped that, when human modification came, it would be for purposes aesthetic rather than military. Instead—" He gestured with his martini at the waiter's broad back. "What rough beast."

"Ein jeder Engel ist schreklich."

Unger seemed momentarily startled. "I'd forgotten—that was dedicated to an ancestor of yours, wasn't it?"

Lamoral looked at the waiter's receding back. "I bet he'd like to throttle the lot of us."

"It's an impulse that comes over everyone on occasion."

"I take it, by the fact you're here at all, that you've been cleared by Detective Helmsley."

"Insofar as anyone's been cleared." Unger gave a shrug and finished his second martini. The glass shattered in the eye of the stone Long-ear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Did you do it?"

Unger grinned. "Let's get another drink."

They headed for the bar, and Unger got two more martinis. Lamoral had some prewar Bernkastel out of a bottle with one of his chateaus on it. It hadn't aged well.

Unger waved a glass at the crowd, the four-armed warriors and the pack of sweaty celebrities. "The time grows nigh," he said. "Signs are all about us. The beasts and the angels surround us and deafen us with their barking. Soon the peace of Ariel will descend."

"That's what you want?"

"A curtain of black snow." Unger slammed down the first drink, swayed, placed the glass on the bar with an odd delicacy of movement. "I wanted to see the finish, I guess. That's why I'm here." He belched. "To look right in the pathetic eyes of the last pale, wormy, pathetic denizen of this corroded old planet and remind him what *promise* we once had. Then lie down in the black snow and close my eyes and pursue the final liberty, as your family's tame poet put it, not to interpret roses."

" 'O trees of life, when will your winter come?' "

Unger looked severe. "Don't mix elegies. It shows your erudition, but demonstrates a disturbing lack of narrative sense."

"My apologies."

Another belch came. "I'm working on something new. I hope I will be able to recite it soon."

"Good."

"I believe I must vomit now."

"Do get that new liver, won't you?"

"Whatever needs doing." Spoken vaguely as Unger headed for a patch of friendly earth.

Lamoral turned to the dance floor and shared a set with an Italian actress who expected to be recognized and was offended when she was not; a desperate wannabee who talked endlessly about her analysis, as if that somehow made her interesting; and a terrified Somebody's Daughter who didn't want to be here. He was glad to sit out the next dance, and found himself standing next to Helmsley.

The detective was still in his baggy cottons and tennis shoes. His unwinking eyes scanned the crowd incessantly. Lamoral gave him a smile. "Any luck, superintendent?"

Helmsley's face turned toward Lamoral but resolutely resisted any temptation to change expression. "I've interrogated everyone concerned. There's no way of proving anything."

"But you have your suspicions."

"I can't prove suspicions. The murder happened six years ago and two billion kilometers outside my jurisdiction. There's no physical evidence, and everyone had opportunity. I can hope for an eventual confession, but since it's the Party Set the confession will probably happen centuries after I'm dead." His robot eyes turned back to the crowd. "I suppose I can live with the suspense."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm curious. None of your questions pertained to motive."

"Motive isn't provable either. Our prosecutors and judges have computer assistants who prefer physical evidence."

"I see."

"I wouldn't hold my breath for that confession. Whoever did it is a born killer."

Lamoral looked at him. "Indeed?"

"I was recording, remember? In great detail. Pulse and breath rates, involuntary eye movement, pupil dilation, blush response—you'd be amazed what can be done with blush response."

"Physical evidence for your computers?"

"Yes." The implanted eyes turned to Lamoral. "The killer's a sociopath. The murder didn't disturb him at all, no more than pulling up a weed. He or she showed no sign of stress or abnormality—just breezed through the interrogation because there was no internal conviction that anything wrong had been done."

A cold, queasy feeling settled into Lamoral's being. He really didn't want to know any of this.

"Perhaps," he said, "you haven't interrogated the right person."

"Do you believe that?"

Lamoral said nothing.

"Didn't think so," Helmsley said. "I thought I should tell you that you and your brother ought to hope that it was really Cao Cao the killer was after."

Lamoral gave an uneasy smile and shrugged. "Who'd kill *me?*" he said.

A shrug. "If you don't know, I don't."

"I think I should ask someone to dance."

"Don't let me stop you."

"I thank you for your warning."

"You're welcome." The artificial eyes flicked toward Lamoral. "Try not to get killed in my jurisdiction. I'd hate to go through all this futility again."

"I'll do my very best to oblige, superintendent."

"Good luck."

Lamoral thought the wish simply good form on the detective's part. The Party Set were a distant cinema fantasy moving through his present; it wasn't as if he cared about them, or they for him.

That kind of thing, given the realities, just wasn't possible.

Not many of the Set attended El Día de Los Muertos. The war and Cao Cao's murder raised, some said, serious questions of taste concerning a festival which celebrated death. Alex, Kitsune, and Carolly announced their intentions of sleeping through it. Lamoral brooded about their reasons: perhaps they just wanted to avoid a celebration of something the entire Party Set was created in order to deny.

Lamoral went alone, dropping onto the landing field in his two-seater

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hirondel, and hoped to find in the celebration of mortality some kind of focus for his thoughts.

But he hadn't expected the fiesta to take place on a battlefield. Guadalajara had been fought over, and afterward an earthquake had perpetrated a Brownian redistribution of the rubble. The Day of the Dead was held in front of what had been the colonial governor's palace, a building as classical, and as dead, as the Party Set's phony Roman ruins. Long strands of particolored lights were strung up around the plaza, each bright bulb alternating with a grinning skeleton that danced in the fitful wind. VTOs dropped from the sky in graceful silence, disgorging a cheerful and macabre crowd. Surrounding the cleared area were a circle of police, and beyond it more lights: the fires of those who lived outside the enchanted circle.

Too many of the celebrants, Lamoral thought, had come dressed as soldiers, their faces painted to resemble skulls.

He was himself in a red satin cavalier's outfit, suitable for Poe's *Masque* as well as this one. He'd ordered it for the festival six years ago, and it had waited in his closet ever since.

The Virgin of Zapopan, a miraculous survivor of the bombing, took a tour of the ruins, riding with the bishop in an open-topped Tin Lizzie. Folk dancers pirouetted in flounced skirts. The cadet band from Chapultepec, garbed in Napoleonic splendor, bounced brassy notes off the torn corners of buildings. After Taps, the party began in earnest.

Eurydike Ichimonji-Apostolidis approached Lamoral atop the guest grandstand and mutely offered ceviche on a tortilla chip. Lamoral ate it.

"Too much parsley."

"I thought so, too."

She wore a long gown on which—in which?—skeletons, attired in tie and tails, tap-danced with bamboo canes clutched in segmented white fingers. Their moves, Lamoral observed, were really very good.

"Are the skeletons from the same quarter as the fish?" Lamoral asked.

"No. These aren't hiding in the *n*th dimension, they're a video projection. They're programmed to follow the Astaire solos from several of his films."

"You're wearing a TV set?"

"More or less."

"Are you also recording?"

She shook her head. "Not I."

Lamoral helped himself to more ceviche from a bowl she was carrying. "I'd ask you to dance," he said, "but I'm afraid your skeletons would show me up."

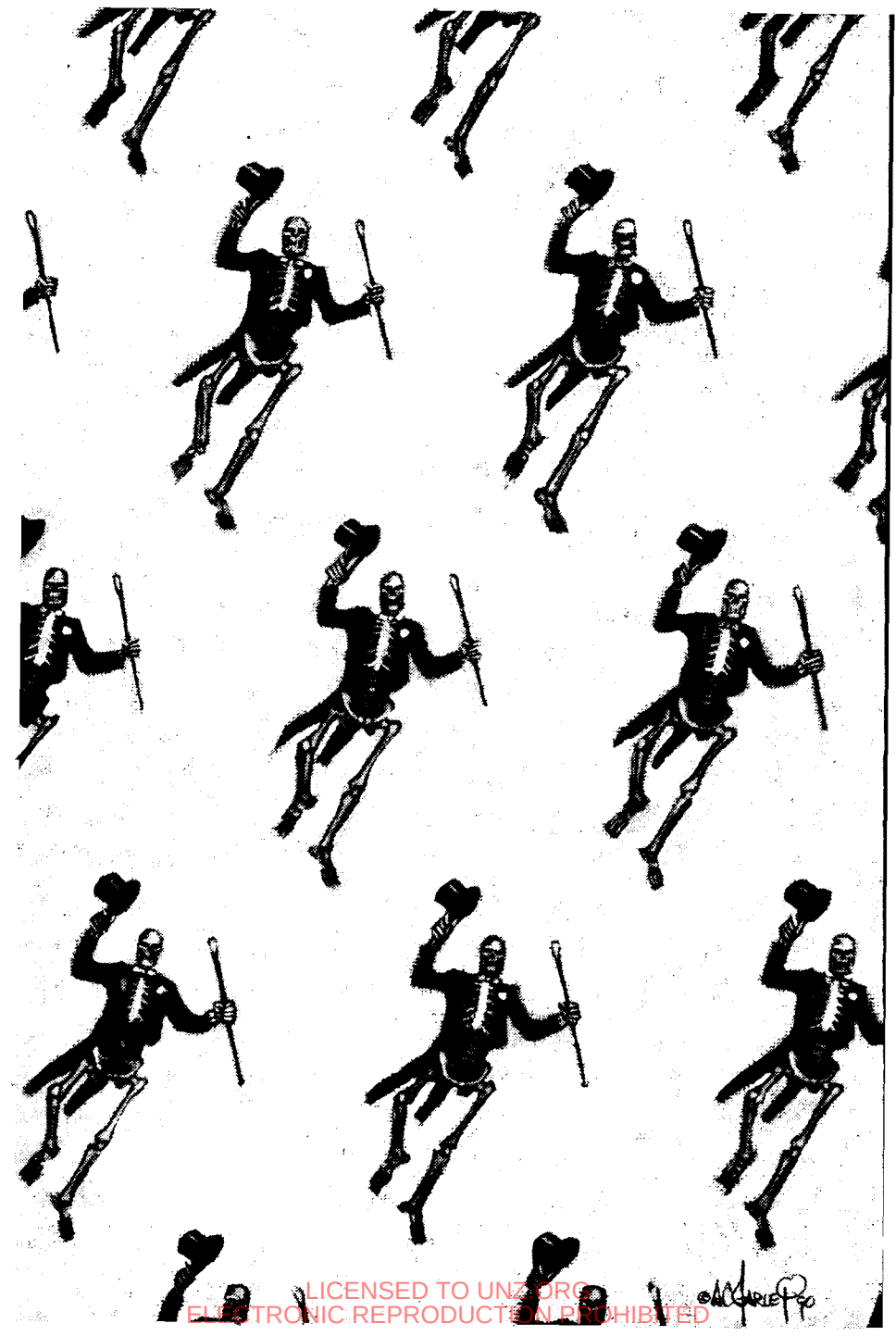
"That's all right. My uncle Guzman has the first dance anyway."

"Any relation of the president?"

"His nephew. A senator."

Lamoral looked at her. "Did you grow up in Mexico? You seem to have done more here than spend six years in a cold bunker."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She grinned. "I didn't grow up in any one place or another, but I spent a lot of time in Mexico, yes. I love it."

"I suppose that would explain your presence at this event."

Eyebrows lifted. "Shouldn't I be here? This is the first Party Set event since I've joined."

"Yesterday you found our conversation morbid, and this fiesta, after all, celebrates morbidity."

Mariachis called out from the bandstand, an explosion of trumpets. Eurydike laughed at the sound.

"I used to come here when I was little. The skeletons were all my friends."

"I should like to hear about your childhood sometime."

"We would seem to have all the time necessary." She saw her uncle Guzman, waved, and danced away on feet as light as those of dead Astaires.

Outside the perimeter, the lights flickered and heaved. The crowd trying to get a better view of things.

"Ah. Lamoral." A heavy hand clapped Lamoral's shoulder. Lamoral turned and saw that the hand was Edwardes'. Lamoral made a note to the effect that Edwardes could tell him from his brother, even from behind and in a disguise. Probably the killer had wanted Cao Cao after all.

The tenor was dressed as the Reaper himself, his visage hooded by a monk's cowl, a rosary wound round his waist.

"Lamoral. We want you to hear something," Edwardes said. His face had a twitchy Lilt smile. Unger lurched into view from behind Edwardes' towering form. Sweat was ruining the poet's fine skull makeup. A garland of roses embraced his forehead.

"Isn't that painful?" Lamoral asked.

"Poets learn to enjoy the thorns. Listen."

"At last his unromantic heart
Was broken, the only way
Possible, pierced from
Within by perfect sextile spears.

Was it not absolute already, that
Sub-zero manner, the cold ammonia
That lisped from his mantis tongue?

He came among us
A faultless monument to frost.
The final deperition
Followed by years the
Triumph of the metaphor.
His prescient cenotaph, already built,
Points his dying-place—the gutter X

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Filled with upwelling rubble, all cold;
A horizon of black; and poison drifts
Of implacable, maculate snow."

"We're thinking of having it set to music," Edwardes said. "I'll sing it at my Christmas concert."

"It's good," said Lamoral, "but it'll never replace 'Jingle Bells.' "

Edwardes gave a long, delighted giggle, all Lilt. "That's good, Unger." He nudged the poet with an elbow. " 'Jingle Bells'!" he said.

Lamoral looked at Unger. "I almost wish you hadn't made the effort," he said. "I wish you'd memorialized Sandy instead."

There was a moment of silence. "I think it's already been done," Unger said. "By people more talented than myself."

There was a bad taste in Lamoral's mouth. "As the Muse moves you, Unger."

"I'll do it!" cried Edwardes.

He tossed his monk's cowl back with a quick, wired gesture, and suddenly the glorious voice spread its wings over the plaza.

"Tu che a dio spiegasti l'ali . . ."

Edwardes' voice rolled like a great wave over mariachi brass. Lamoral watched with a cold incredulity as Edwardes lamented the passing of Lucia di Lammermoor, and he tried to decide whether Sandy would have liked it this way, an improvised memorial in the midst of the dancing dead, a sobbing tenor in combat with brassy dance music . . . He decided she probably would have liked it, if her mood was in the right place, but that ultimately it didn't matter. All the shades were here tonight, emissaries from the grave, from the future, their identities concealed behind skull-masks and gaiety . . .

Behind him a woman was weeping. Tears spilled out of the eyeholes of her mask. Tears fell down Edwardes' face in accompaniment.

There was a ripple of shots, of explosions. A bright, smoky form moved on balloon tires across the plaza, the *Totentanz* all done in fireworks, Death hand in hand with dancing mortals, types created in broad caricature: peasant, worker, capitalist, soldier. This was where proletarian art survived, Lamoral thought, in Mexican firework *castillos*. People shouted and applauded. Death's grin winked briefly off the polished skin of a descending Dart. Outside the perimeter, lights massed in other, fleeting patterns. Lamoral could see police shifting position.

Edgardo perished by his own hand—Edwardes actually sagged to the ground—and Lucia went into the tomb. Lamoral thanked moist-eyed Edwardes for the memorial and stepped off the grandstand into the mass of people. Skulls grinned at him from all sides. A second *castillo* went off: sharp detonations revealed Poe with a raven on his shoulder, another ghost visiting the proceedings. The crowd roared its welcome. There was a hysteria in the sound that Lamoral didn't like.

A surge almost took him off his feet. He found a safe eddy in the mass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and caught his breath. A vision in white lace caught his eye, a skeleton in the form of a bride, walking arm-in-arm with a dapper Asian man.

Lamoral's heart hammered. He stared, but the vision had turned away.

Angels (says Rilke) are often unable to tell whether they move among the living or the dead.

Lamoral shouldered through the charnel mass, keeping the bride's high white comb in sight. *Castillos* burst into crackling fire. Angels and demons battled each other across the sky. There was a scream, the sight of descending fists. Lamoral fought his way through the crowd.

Unger had his arms around Edwardes' huge torso, trying to drag him off the struggling form of Cao Cao, who was fighting gamely but was smothered by Edwardes' bulk. Edwardes' massive black hands were tightened around Cao Cao's throat. The death-bride's long veil was askew; she screamed and beat on Edwardes' shoulders with her fists. *Castillos* burst into raucous life. Lamoral rushed forward in a crouch, slammed a shoulder into Edwardes' chest, drove him back. Unger, driven back as well, stumbled and fell. Edwardes tripped over him and crashed massively to the cobbles.

Alex rose from the rubble and tore off his Cao Cao mask. Indira Batish dashed to his aid, her bridal costume giving a long rip as someone stepped on it. Edwardes roared up from Unger's embrace and Lamoral kicked the tenor in the face, dropping him atop Unger again. Alex's eyes started from his head as he tried to scrape Edwardes' paw prints off his throat.

Shots echoed over the plaza. There were screams and the crowd surged.

"They've broken through!" someone shouted.

"It was a *joke*, you idiot!" Alex yelled. He had the beginnings of a terrific shiner.

A wall of panicked skeletons stumbled over Unger and Edwardes, burying them. Lamoral was driven away from them all: he could hear Indira's scream of outrage as she was torn away from Alex. Shots crackled out. Lamoral realized it wasn't fireworks anymore. He ran for his VTO, but everyone else had the same idea, and the mob swarmed into the tight confines of the parking field, so tightly that no one could move, and no rocket could rise.

A preprogrammed *castillo* filled the sky with gargoyles built of garish light. In the blazing red and green Lamoral saw skeletons staggering in the press with uncanny grace; he fought his way to Eurydike, lashed with elbows to make room and air for them both. Gunshots flogged the air. Half the people were sobbing, the other half screamed in anger. There was another volley and suddenly the crowd was running in a different direction. The way to the VTO was clear.

The hatch opened to Lamoral's handprint. The interior of the two-seater Hirondel had the reassuring smell of fine leather. Eurydike wept against Lamoral's shoulder as he told the machine to take them to Regensburg.

"There are personnel within range of the boosters," the Hirondel reported. "I am warning them to stand clear."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Skeletons danced in graceful pirouette. The hull rang to faint volleys. "As soon as possible, computer," Lamoral said. He found Eurydike's lips and kissed them.

"Lifting now," said the computer.

"To the palace, and quickly," Lamoral said, as if the computer could whip up the coach horses. He found Eurydike's lips again.

The scattered dead dropped away beneath them.

Eurydike reclined on a pile of pillows and finished her glass of Marcobrunn. "My uncle Guzman warned me something might happen," she said. "The government's been trying to get the squatters out of the ruins so they can rebuild."

"The government wanted the squatters to crash in?" Lamoral asked. "They provoked it?"

"Not *all* the government. Not the Guzman faction. But Guadalajara's mayor and ruling clique, yes."

"Huh. Just *let* them try to get another Set function within the next century."

"Small comfort."

"My personal consolation," said Lamoral, "is that I'm going to outlive the lot of them by centuries."

Eurydike gave a small smile. "There is that. Yes."

It was early evening in Bavaria. Things had been sorted out in Mexico: no Set members had perished, and Alex, Edwardes, and Indira were bunkered down back in Bermuda. Wayne Unger was getting his new liver in a clinic in Morocco.

There was a knock on the door. Eurydike drew a sheet over herself while Lamoral reached for the gold door-handle and opened it. A servant in livery, complete with silk stockings and knee breeches, offered a package.

"For the lady, serene highness."

"Thank you." Lamoral took the package and closed the door. He put it on the marble surface of the seventeenth-century dressing table and turned to Eurydike.

"We'll be dining with my family. I took the liberty of ordering suitable clothing."

"Will they fit?"

"Of course. I called Bermuda for your measurements, and my sister's dressmaker whipped up something appropriate while you were asleep."

Eurydike laughed. "You got all this done after I drifted off? Don't you ever sleep?"

"For years at a time."

"Right. I forgot." She laughed again. Lamoral decided he liked the sound.

Eurydike waved an arm, indicating the room with its white and gold rococo molding, the floating nymphs and cherubs cavorting across the domed ceiling, the half-acre of canopied bed, the crusted procelain vases

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and gleaming antique furniture, the Poussin landscape over the gilt porcelain fireplace . . .

"Joining the Party Set can't have been much of a change for you, could it? You were living in a fantasy world already."

"Without the benefits of Adjustment."

She leaned forward. "So why'd you do it?"

"Join the Set, you mean?"

"If you can afford servants in knee breeches instead of robots, you can afford your own cold bunkers. You could have your own damn Set, and your taste's probably better than the Doyenne's anyway. So why did you need Mary Maude Mullen and company?"

Lamoral stepped to the silver Flaxman ice pail and withdrew a half-empty bottle of Marcobrunn. Ice clinked cheerfully in the pail's interior.

"Another glass?"

"Yes. And my question answered, please."

Lamoral poured. "If you promise not to spread it about."

"Cross my heart and hope to be embarrassed in some horrible public fashion."

They clinked glasses. Lamoral sat on the bed and leaned against the carved ivory-inlaid bedpost. "During the Bolshevik Interregnum the family lost our property in Hungary, Prussia, and Bohemia. A dozen or so castles, of which only Chraustowitz and Chotieschau were really worth getting upset about, but there was a lot of land attached."

"But these were returned, yes?"

"Most of it. After the family bank made certain loans to the governments concerned, yes."

"Ah."

"Anyway, there was still the problem of inheritance taxes, which remained rather stiff over there. While my grandfather was the current prince, my father renounced the inheritance in order to avoid passing property to me crippled by more than one tax assessment—he took minor holy orders and retired to Neresheim Abbey, which is one of the family churches, quite the nicest one by the way—and that made me Inheritor-Prince."

"I see where this is heading," Eurydike said, "and I'm not quite sure I believe it."

"To quote a friend of mine quoting someone she could never quite remember, you can look it up."

"I will. Believe me."

"So I joined the Set, and I'll live for centuries. My grandfather's death put quite a dent in the family finances, but the dent should be well hammered out by the time I have an heir and breathe my last—"

"You joined the Set to avoid paying inheritance taxes!" Eurydike was delighted.

"One shouldn't pay them, you know." Sipping Marcobrunn. "Not more than once a century, anyway."

"It's got to be the greatest tax dodge in history!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It isn't as if I haven't been having a good time."

"I can see you have."

"You should dress. My sister will want to give us supper, and I'll give you the short tour on our way to the dining room."

"The short tour?"

"Schloss St. Emmeram has over five hundred rooms."

"Good grief. Are they all furnished like this one?"

"More or less. The offices in the old medieval wing tend to be more functional, but then there's the throne room, which is more ornate."

"A throne room? You sit on a throne?"

"I'm *forbidden* to sit on it, actually. It's for the Hapsburg Emperor. Just in case the Everlasting Diet ever sits again."

"Good grief."

Lamoral refilled his glass and walked to the door. "I'll be in the hall outside," he said.

"Lamoral?"

He put his palm on the door-handle, turned to face her. "Yes?"

Eurydike looked at him intently. "How did your family get all this in the first place?"

Lamoral smiled. "We invented the science of modern data management and transmission."

"You owned IBM or something?"

"Not quite. We ran the first post office."

"Oh." Eurydike blinked. "You moved hardcopy."

"Hardcopy," Lamoral said, "was big in those days. We had the mail monopoly for the Holy Roman Empire, and pretty much moved hardcopy for everyone else in Europe and Latin American as well."

Eurydike thought about it. "I guess hardcopy was the thing, all right."

"As long as we're speaking of ancestors . . ." Sipping Marcobrunn.

"Yes?"

"I've been wondering about yours. Is your hyphen the result of your marriage, or your ancestors'?"

She gave a chuckle. "Neither. It reflects an alliance between genetics and capital."

"I think the *Landadel* would understand that well enough."

"About twenty-five years ago the whole *n*-dimensional problem was beginning to be perceived, in embryo, as the next big thing in science. My legal guardian, Basil Apostolidis—"

"*That* Apostolidis?"

"The very same. His companies were into cutting-edge science and technology, and he knew that if he could beat the other technocrats to the punch, he could make a fortune—well, *another* fortune. So in typical freebooting Greek fashion he set out to build something that could solve the problem for him."

"Which was?"

"Me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lamoral stared at her, shocked. Eurydike burst out laughing. "Don't look at me like that!" she said. "I'm a damned successful experiment!"

"Just bred you? They didn't *ask*—"

"Who gets asked? Did they ask you if you wanted to be Inheritor-Prince? I'm a damn sight luckier than those four-armed killers whose chief occupation these days is waiting tables for the Party Set."

"You're right." He still felt a bit stunned. "I apologize."

"I suppose the idea must be a bit startling to someone from another century. *Several* other centuries, I mean," Waving her free arm at the schloss. "Anyway, most of my genetics came from a Japanese mathematician named Ichimonji, who had a Nobel and was considered top-of-the-mark, although a bit past his prime. A nice fellow, Ichiro, by the way, I met him lots of times before he died in the war. And I got some of Basil's genes, I guess because he couldn't resist, and some other genetics considered desirable for one reason or other. Some of Einstein's, some of—"

"Einstein? But he lived centuries ago. How did they—?"

"They've got lots of cells. His brain was preserved in a cardboard box behind a beer cooler in Kansas City." She saw his expression and laughed again. "To quote you quoting your friend quoting someone or other, you could look it up."

Lamoral blinked. "I don't believe I really want to know the truth behind that story, I'm afraid. It might turn out to be true."

"Basil created a full dozen of us, each with slightly different mixes of genetics, and we were each raised in a highly structured environment in which we were exposed to math and science."

"You were in Mexico City."

"Most of the time. Anyway, about half of us managed to resist the indoctrination and never turned out scientists. The rest got interested enough in science to start working on the problem. We'd do all our work separately and compare notes later. And I was the one who got the brass ring."

"And the Party Set?"

She shrugged. "Senility comes early to most mathematicians: we do our best work before we're thirty. I didn't want to spend my life trying to top my earlier work, so I took my millions in royalties and retired."

"After sitting out the war."

"I retired prior to the war. It was the Party Set that came after."

"I see." He hesitated. "I'll let you dress."

"See you soon."

Lamoral stepped into the hallway and closed the door behind him.

Schloss St. Emmeram, stone and marble and plaster and gilt, loomed in vast, serene silence around him.

Hardcopy.

The Dart dropped out of a cold Regensburg sky. "Thank you for your offer of hospitality," Eurydike said, "but I'm going to Bermuda and sleep

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

until these little bits of war stop breaking out. During the last few years, people have just acquired the wrong habits. Maybe I'll rise for Edwardes' Christmas concert next year."

"I'll probably see you there." Lamoral turned up the collar of his overcoat.

The Dart made its silent landing on the rain-wet concrete pad. Eurydike turned to Lamoral and kissed him goodbye.

"See you next year."

"Bye."

Lamoral watched the Dart rise into the cloud cover, then returned to his auto and told it to take him back to the schloss. He had family to meet.

And plans to make. Party Set stock had suffered a double blow when Cao Cao's death was followed by the riot during the Day of the Dead.

The family, and the family bank, was buying.

Step One, Lamoral thought.

He didn't know what Step Two was yet, but was confident it would at some point evolve.

Christmas, 2145: for Lamoral, one Set-day later. While he was asleep, the Thurn und Taxis family had filed suit against the Party Set for damages suffered, during the war, on account of lack of guidance from the head of the family. The suit was settled out of court for an undisclosed sum. Though Lamoral wasn't fully cognizant of present currency values, it still seemed a whopping great sum.

So much for Step One. Waking up was getting to be a little more interesting.

Lamoral finished knotting his bow tie and turned to Alex.

"I don't know if I'd attend, were I you," he said, "considering what happened the last time you and Edwardes met."

"He was so far gone on Lilt he thought it was Cao Cao he was strangling."

"Don't be too sure. He knew me through my costume."

"It's that aura of noblesse that surrounds you, Lamoral. It's unmistakable."

Lamoral turned to the mirror again, buttoned his dinner jacket. "If I have it, you've got it."

"I'm the younger son, remember?"

"By twenty minutes."

"They're a very significant twenty minutes. They mark the difference between the anointed prince and the guy who gets to follow in his wake and play the practical jokes."

Lamoral looked at Alex. "No practical jokes tonight, Alex," he said.

"I've got a sack of rotten eggs for the tenor."

Lamoral hardened his look. "No, Alex."

Alex held his eyes for a moment, then turned away. "If you insist."

"Why would Edwardes want to strangle Cao Cao?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alex looked surprised. "Because of Lilt, of course."

"What about it?"

Alex gave a disbelieving grin. "You really don't understand about human weakness, do you?"

"Not Edwardes' weakness, anyway."

"Edwardes *needs* Lilt. Once his life was filled with his career, but he gave that up. Helen Nomathemba was his first substitute, but he lost *her*; and what's left is Lilt. And there are no drawbacks with Lilt—no hangover, no loss of motor coordination, no toxic effects at all. You have to saturate yourself with it to get as soused as Edwardes gets. Practically drown yourself in vats of it."

"Yes."

Alex was patient. "You hate anything you need that badly, don't you?"

Light dawned. "Ah." Lamoral thought for a moment. "If he wants to destroy himself so much, why not use alcohol?"

Alex shrugged. "Lilt doesn't wreck the voice."

"Oh."

Alex started for the door, put his hand on the knob. "Perhaps it's only because he challenged me to a duel and then tried to strangle me, but I suspect he's the chap that annihilated Cao Cao."

"I'm thinking the same thing."

Alex stepped into the corridor. "I wouldn't turn my back on him."

"I won't. Will you?"

They looked at each other for a moment, and then Alex nodded.

"Understood," he said. "I'll meet you on the Dart."

Indira, who hated opera—some tenors more than others—chose to sleep through Christmas, and Alex escorted Kitsune to the box.

Kitsune and Alex chatted away till the lights began to dim, but Eurydike seemed in a contemplative mood. Lamoral tried several conversational sallies, but she failed to respond. Giving up, he opened his program and began to read.

"Stille Nacht," okay. "O Sole Mio," for all the people who couldn't live without hearing it one more time. Spender's "Stable Lass," a sentimental holiday favorite. Ending, before the interval, with the tenor aria from *Messiah*. After the interval was Mozart's "Exsultate Jubilate," which presumably had been written down from soprano to tenor, but which should still contain enough high notes to keep Edwardes' audience on the edge of their chairs. *Otello* again, a peculiar choice in this context. Edwardes just couldn't stay away from the part. Then an aria from Otake's *Ran*, the one where, after the death of his loyal son, the Old Daimyo curses his remaining children. Lamoral could feel the hair on his neck begin to lift. And after that was Judas's song from *Night in Jerusalem*, wherein the betrayer makes up his mind to sell Jesus to the Romans.

After which came "Deck the Halls," in which, Lamoral understood from the program, the audience was supposed to participate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Christmas concert, Lamoral thought. Right. Edwardes was going to sing the most anguished, violent songs in his repertoire, then try to cheer everyone up with a sing-along. It would all be happy as a group sing at the court of King Oedipus, Lamoral thought, with Jocasta keeping time, swinging by the neck from the roofbeams.

The house lights dimmed. Lamoral watched Alex set his face into a condescending, slightly contemptuous mask. He couldn't throw eggs, but he could pretend Edwardes' voice wasn't up to the mark.

And again Alex was wrong. Rising like a flooding aural tide from the acoustic bowl of the New Met, Edwardes' voice was glorious, the best Lamoral had ever heard. Alex's display seemed petulant alongside such magnificence. No wonder Edwardes had put his voice on ice, revealed it only occasionally over the years—he would give another singer time to build a name and reputation, then make a carefully-crafted appearance like this and blow the newcomer out of the water. Edwardes was not aiming simply at immortality, but at deification: the new Apollo, God-King of the Tenors.

And he'd left the Lilt alone. There wasn't any happy smile, any false jolliness.

Alex was perhaps the only audience member—besides the Doyenne, of course—not on his feet at the end of the Handel. As the applause died down, Lamoral turned to Eurydike and smiled. "Excuse me, 1A," she said, and made her way out of the box.

Lamoral watched her go, smile frozen to his face, then left the box while the applause was still rising from the audience.

"I thought she should know," Carolly said, one short moment later. "Sorry if I upset you."

Carolly was on her way to the bar, flicking open and shut an antique Japanese lacquered fan ornamented with peacocks and ocean waves. Lamoral had given it to her decades ago.

"It's a little early to hand Eurydike this 1A stuff, don't you think?" Lamoral asked.

The fan opened, covered Carolly's face. One eye winked out, its green iris cold as a jade marble. "Better she should know now," muffled by the fan, "than find out as I did."

Lamoral drank a double brandy during the interval and returned to his box to find Eurydike feigning genteel interest in her program. Alex gave Lamoral a sympathetic look. Lamoral seated himself and leaned toward Eurydike.

"I would have told you," Lamoral said.

Her look was cooler than he would have liked. "I'm not upset."

"I hope to hell not."

She offered him a slight smile. Lights dimmed, and it was time for Mozart.

Edwardes' second half was staggering. Never had Lamoral seen so much emotional power concentrated on a stage. Without props or costumes, Edwardes called up the sixteenth century, first a man tearing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away at the rags of civilization that covered his anguished, raving, violent soul; and then, switching from Italian to Japanese, Edwardes created a man brought to nothing, no hope, no future, no family, nothing but impotent rage and desolation, waving fists and spouting curses at an indifferent sky. His massive form seemed to shrink; under a cool blue spotlight he seemed a scrawny old man, half-starved, dressed in silken rags. His Judas, after all this, was surprisingly tranquil, a man resolving formally to perform an act he'd long ago made up his mind to do, a deed that somehow put his mind at peace—and that interpretation, somehow, seemed more unsettling than anything that had preceded it.

"Deck the Halls" came as a considerable relief, to Lamoral as well as the rest of the audience. Lamoral mopped his brow and left the box while the audience was singing the first chorus. He needed to make a phone call.

He got Helmsley out of bed, but the detective's robot eyes were unclouded by sleep.

"I know who killed Cao Cao," Lamoral said. "It was Thomas Edwardes."

"Can you prove it?"

"Look at the vid of the Christmas concert. I've never seen anything more revealing in my life. It was a virtual confession."

Helmsley was silent for a long moment. Then, "I don't think so."

"Look at the vid!"

"I will. But I don't think Edwardes did it."

Lamoral stared at the phone screen. "How can you say that?" he said finally.

"Edwardes is a passionate man. A performer. He acts out every emotion as it comes to him, and his emotions are very close to the surface. If he'd chilled Cao Cao, I would almost certainly have detected it in the initial interrogation. He's so open that I very much doubt he could have hidden it from me."

Lamoral shook his head. "Look at the concert, superintendent."

"I will."

"He's an actor, remember, not just a singer. During the interrogation he could have been acting the part of an innocent man, and done it with conviction."

Lamoral detected a hint of skepticism breaking through Helmsley's deadpan. "I'll look at the vid, but I make no promises. The file was closed months ago, and I'll need more evidence than a concert recording to get it reopened."

Lamoral blanked the screen without saying goodbye. He went to the bar, had another double cognac, and waited for Edwardes to finish his encores. After a while Lamoral got tired of waiting and went back to the box.

The crowd was baying its pleasure. Even Alex was on his feet applauding, though his expression showed he was just being polite. Edwardes did his fourth encore—the "Exsultate" again—then waved and skipped off the stage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He'll be Lilted to the ears by midnight," Kitsune predicted.

The reception afterward had only a few hundred people, mostly Party Set and New York's government. The mayor handed Edwardes a key to the city; Edwardes gave a Lilting grin and raised the key in one big hand.

"You're upset," Lamoral said later. It was their first moment away from the others.

Eurydike looked at him. "I told you I wasn't."

"I didn't know that you didn't know. If you'd been watching Set recordings . . ."

"I was solving the mysteries of the universe. Sorry."

Lamoral tried to make a joke. "We could make it morganatic," he smiled. "If it came to that."

Her face was stony. "How many 1As are there, anyway?"

"Thousands, I suppose. Before I joined the Set I used to get introductions all the time." He made a face. "Suitable women."

"I can't believe that this kind of medieval thing still goes on. Don't peers marry showgirls all the time?"

"English peers can, I guess. But if one of the *Landadel* did, the *Almanach de Gotha* would degrade the whole pedigree to—"

Her eyebrows arched. "1B?"

"Second, at least. Or third." Laughing, still trying to make a joke out of it.

She shuddered in mock horror. "And then the sky would *really* fall."

He looked at her. "I didn't invent this, you know."

"So you can't breed an heir with me. Or if you did, the rules would disinherit him right at the start."

"There are ways around everything, Eurydike."

"I can just imagine."

Lamoral thought for a moment, trying to find a way to explain things. "One doesn't live entirely for oneself, you know. There are responsibilities that extend from generation to generation."

"Right. Keeping the castles up, avoiding inheritance taxes . . ." She gave a snarl. "Snobbery! My God, as if any of it mattered!"

"The Set isn't based on snobbery?"

"*I'm* not, whatever the Set is."

"You're new to the Set, Eurydike. The first thing you learn is that there is plenty of time for everything. I didn't think you'd want to drop out of the Set, get married, and start producing children quite so soon."

Eurydike linked her arm with his, looked up at him. "I'm not as upset as you seem to think I am, Lamoral. This whole pedigree thing is just," searching for the word, "*emblematic* of something else. That I *am* young, that I *am* new to the Set."

"Yes."

"That I've lived in one Apostolidis fortress or another all my life, and that I need a few flights of freedom before I deal with yet another set of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formidable ancestors. Castles, servants in wigs, thrones that one can or can't sit on, all that."

He might as well, Lamoral thought, surrender with grace. " 'Wenn ihr einer dem andern euch an den Mund hebt und ansetzt—: Getränk an Getränk: o wie entgeht dann der Trinkende seltsam der Handlung.' "

" 'When you lift yourselves to each other's lips,' " she said, raising herself to him; her lips were moist. " 'Drink unto drink.' " Again and again. " 'O how strangely the drinker eludes . . . *her* . . . part.' " Correcting for gender.

She turned, to find a VTO to take her back to Bermuda and frozen time. Lamoral watched her collect her wrap and go out into the sleet; and afterwards he saw Edwardes' key in the trash.

Sunset flamed along the gold-and-vermilion walls of the Potala. Lamoral looked out at the mountains beyond and felt a taste of longing touch his tongue.

He didn't *do* that any more, he reminded himself.

"I'd stay clear of Edwardes if I were you, Lamoral." Unger's voice was heavy in his ear. "A microcamera recorded that phone call of yours last year, the one to Bermuda."

"Ah," Lamoral said. A faint alarm chimed in his mind. "Now he'll want to strangle me *and* my brother."

"He's angry enough to do it." Unger gave a laugh. "An interesting picture, don't you think, one of you dangling in either of Edwardes' hands?"

Lamoral looked at him. Even though Unger was carrying a cocktail shaker and a couple of glasses, he didn't seem as drunk as usual. But then, of course, the night was young.

"We'll all have to be a lot more careful," Unger said. "Recorders were damn near microscopic before, but now thanks to Eurydike they can hide the things in the *n*th dimension."

"Have you told Alex?" Lamoral asked.

"About Edwardes? What difference would it make?"

Lamoral considered. "None, I suppose. You're right there."

"You have a respite. He's not in Lhasa, he's resting on his frozen laurels back in Bermuda."

"Good."

"Tell you what," Unger said. "I'll write a poem about bloodshed, and you can accuse me next. It'll boost my royalties."

"Only if I get a cut, Unger."

Tonight the Party was being held in a domed restaurant and nightclub, built in the shape of a steel-and-crystal lotus four hundred meters high. There were hints that His Omniscience the Dalai Lama might choose to drop by later and pay his respects, one immortal to another.

Cymbals clattered on the bandstand as the drummer, setting up, dropped his equipment. Lamoral turned at the sound. The Party Set were finishing their predinner cocktails and sitting down at their tables along

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with an assortment of robed monks and Tibetan and Chinese officials. Lamoral could see Alex with Indira Batish, Eurydike sharing a table with Carolly, Kitsune chatting to one of the musicians.

"Buy you a drink?" Unger asked. He raised a cocktail shaker in one hand and a pair of glasses in the other.

Lamoral shrugged. "Why not?"

They both looked up as something flashed up above. Through the clear dome they could see a bright rift appearing in the violet Tibetan sky, a widening slit through which golden light poured . . .

"Is this on the program?" Unger wondered. Lamoral shaded his eyes.

Suddenly there was a wide stairway extending from the bright hole in the sky, gilded and ruddy like the vermilion face of the Potala. The stair descended in a rainbow arc toward Lhasa, but like a rainbow faded to nothingness as it approached the ground.

Lamoral's heart leaped into his throat. A figure was moving on the stair, descending from out of the golden light toward the ground. The figure was hundreds of meters tall. He was dressed in an elaborate brocaded robe and a tall gold headdress on which the heads of gods and demons were carved—except that the heads all seemed to be alive, their mouths speaking something no one could hear, their eyes rolling in unison.

Chaos burst out in the dining room, people shouting, rushing for a better view. Monks began to chant sutras.

Lamoral watched as the figure slowly descended the stairs, then vanished into the darkness of the Lhasa valley. The rift in the sky sealed up.

"Good trick," said Unger. He poured from the shaker into his two glasses.

Lamoral turned and looked at Eurydike. She was still staring, open-mouthed, at the darkened sky.

"I think this was one of Eurydike's," Lamoral said.

"God from the *n*th dimension," Unger said. "Is that in her equations?"

"It is now."

Unger drained a glass. "Just think what we're going to get come Christmas." He drained the other. "Oh dear," he said conversationally. "I seem to have carelessly consumed your drink as well as mine."

"Go right ahead," Lamoral said. "I have a feeling the rest of the evening's going to be anticlimactic anyway."

The next Set-day, Eurydike was awarded the Nobel Prize, and everyone went to Stockholm for the party. A Set-day later, Alex and Indira had a screaming argument in the lounge of the floating Palace of Kanayasha, but the Set-day following they made it up at a party staged in high-Earth orbit. During the subsequent Adjustment, a terribly dull Malagasque professor delivered a lecture about *n*-dimensional pocket universes, the Buddha's appearance being a "reverse dimensional manifestation," and even Eurydike had trouble following it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A fraction of a Set-day later, Lamoral and Alex were awakened by a call from Regensburg—it was part of the agreement that settled their suit with the Party Set that Regensburg could so awaken them—and, while the Lilt still buzzed in their brains, courteous and sympathetic Adjustors told them that Gloria had died in her sleep.

The funeral and other arrangements took a week of realtime. Gloria's second child, Claudius, was put in charge of the family business, the first child having taken her trust fund and fired herself in the general direction of the constellation Hercules, from which red-shifted correspondence arrived at dutiful intervals.

Claudius was informed of Plans One and Two. He approved of both.

The next Set-day was a Party Barge trip to the Sea of Moscow on the far side of Luna. "I've seen Moscow," Alex said, blinking out of the dome at the grey desolation, "and I've seen its Sea, and neither can be said to improve the other." Though it had been objective months since Gloria's death, Lamoral still felt the loss slicing into his throat like a sharp mortal blade. Carolly hovered around him protectively and thankfully prevented him from hurting himself or others.

Plan Two was plotted in detail.

Gloria's death kept digging talons into Lamoral's heart.

Next Set-day, Lamoral presented his plan for a full-scale Regensburg boar-hunt to the Party Set's Board of Directors. Mary Maude Mullen seized the idea with her every fang, though because Set events were planned so far in advance quite a number of sidereal years would have to elapse before the thing could be slotted into the schedule.

Lamoral smiled and said thank-you.

Later in the day, as the Party bobbed along in a glass-walled nautilus at the bottom of the Marianas Trench, Lamoral saw Eurydike dance the tango with a man named Mohammed Abu Minyar al-Mulazim, who was not yet a member of the Set but was understood to be a likely candidate . . . and though Lamoral very much wanted to do something Alex-like and conspicuous, he decided to keep Carolly's company instead.

As Edwardes, in the next chamber of the curled nautiloid shell, was moved spontaneously to burst into the Old Daimyo's aria again, Lamoral listened to the sound vibrating through the structure of the ship and wondered if Carolly had planned all this somehow.

He never found out one way or another.

A Set-month slid by, spent whirlwind-fashion in twenty-odd fortresses of pleasure, the new resort in orbit around Sol, another on the Great Barrier Reef, a Christmas at La Scala for another of Edwardes' comebacks: and then the long cars, black and grey, carried the Party Set from the nearest Regensburg landing field to Schloss St. Emmeram once more. For once they would employ beds for the purposes of sleep; in the morning they would hunt boar.

The new eavesdropping technology had, Lamoral was informed, been conquered. A small device could be purchased that would spot any camera

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

popping out of the *n*th dimension and zap it with an electron beam before it could do anything other than take a single still photo. The zappers were deployed in force: whole squadrons of illegal bugs were shot down in flames. The only pictures getting out of Regensburg would be Set-authorized ones.

Authorized recorders hovering in the background, the marble-columned banquet hall was put to use, one large enough to contain any number of Everlasting Diets. Lamoral sat at one end, with Carolly and Claudius flanking him; Alex was at the other, next to Indira. The brothers were wearing ribbons and decorations, the sort one got more or less automatically for being what they were—it would have been ridiculous to wear them to other functions, but in these surroundings they were not out of place. Mary Maude Mullen sat in the middle, directly opposite a hideous gold centerpiece, a three-century-old gift from the Wittelsbachs, which had been moved from the smaller dining room just for her enjoyment.

Lamoral was surprised at how Claudius had aged; he had become an old man, with powdery hair and broken veins in his cheeks. But he was a good businessman for all that, and had put together a very discreet investment combine that was prepared to make a takeover bid on the Party Set the very second the successful boar hunt was broadcast to the world's millions.

The first course appeared. The servants were wearing their more formal costumes for this appearance, including powdered wigs; Lamoral tried not to notice the incongruity of the eighteenth-century dress as measured against the occasional extra pair of arms, or in one case whip-like tentacles.

Carrying a tray stacked high with plates, one servant rolled past on what looked like giant ball bearings. "For the first time," Lamoral said, "I'm beginning to feel a little out of touch with things."

"The feeling will pass," Carolly said. She was examining Greek goddesses on the Cellini salt cellar. "It always does." She gave a look down the length of the table. "Have you noticed that Edwardes is drinking wine tonight?"

Lamoral looked down the table. "Not Lilt?" Edwardes was holding out a gold-rimmed goblet—a large one meant for mineral water, not wine—to one of the wine stewards.

"The last set of reviews," Carolly said, "the ones for La Scala, were not kind."

Lamoral had not attended; he made a policy of forbidding himself certain associations.

"He had too much Lilt in him," Carolly continued. "The voice was good, but his control was gone. Among other things, he giggled too much."

"So now he's taken up a more destructive addiction."

"If the next concert's a failure, he can blame his choice of intoxicants."

Lamoral sipped his smoky Geisenheim and realized with a pang that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wine had been laid down by Gloria decades ago. "Perhaps I should have a word with the wine steward," he said.

"Do not interfere with people's methods of going to Hell, Lamoral," Carolly said, "and they won't interfere with yours."

Lamoral looked at her, a revelation rolling through his heart. He had heard that tone from her many times before and never, never had he realized what it meant.

"Is that why you're here, Carolly?" he asked. "To watch people send themselves to Hell?"

"It passes the time," Carolly said. Her eyes were cold green stone.

Lamoral looked at the assembled company and wondered why he'd let them into his home. This had always been the place he could retreat to, when the Set grew too onerous: now they were here, an occupying army, and Schloss St. Emmeram would not be the same even after they'd gone.

Eurydike located Lamoral in his office, in the old abbey, where the rooms were little and crooked and worn, furnished largely with stuff taken from Schloss Taxis in the nineteenth century, furnishings that didn't quite fit the small proportions of the old abbey and had either been left there, a bit out of scale, or hacked to fit. The old wing seemed vaguely Dickensian, quaint and odd and somehow comforting, without the lavish proportions of the rest of the palace. Pictures of people, all dead, hung on the walls.

"I was hoping," she said, "to get a dance out of you tonight."

Eurydike wore effortlessly a black strapless dress shot with silver threads; there was black jasper at her earlobes and throat. She kicked one foot back and cocked her body as if for a dance, her arms holding an invisible partner.

Lamoral, in his shirtsleeves and ribbon, took his feet off his desk and leaned his creaking old chair toward her. "A cognac first?"

She accepted and perched on his desk. "Aren't you supposed to be playing the host?"

"I felt the need for a moment of meditation."

"And I interrupted. Sorry."

"The moment passed." He sipped cognac. Fire made a welcome progress through his sinuses. His eyes strayed to a picture of Gloria. "I was thinking how much I miss my sister."

"I only met her that once, but I liked her."

Lamoral said nothing.

"We Set people," Eurydike said, "we have all our tragedies concentrated in such a short time, don't we? Parents die, then siblings die, and it all seems very fast to us. We barely have a chance to get over one death, and then there's another. And everyone's being gay around us, always."

"Let's not forget the wars." Thinking of Sandy, whose picture was not present, and which, he realized, needed to be.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"War. Let's hope there's only the one." She raised her glass and drank a silent toast to that notion. Lamoral followed her example.

"This was Hornmayer, yes? The climber who died?" Inspecting a picture on his desk.

"Hormayr. Karl-August."

"He died, and you joined the Set and never climbed another mountain. I thought that was very romantic when I was young."

Lamoral looked at her. "I thought you told me you spent your youth in a mathematical frenzy and never watched Set recordings."

She gave a throaty laugh. "I wasn't entirely immune to popular culture. I had quite a crush on you, actually, when I was a girl."

"Good God." Lamoral blinked. He had never thought of himself as schoolgirl crush material.

"Somehow I never found out about the 1A business, though."

"As I told you." Frowning. "There are ways around everything."

"Like inheritance taxes."

"Yes." He regarded her. "The climbing wasn't very romantic. It was just something I did. Then something I stopped doing."

"And when Hornmayer—Hormayr—died, that didn't have anything to do with it?"

"Certainly it did. But it didn't have *everything* to do with it." Eurydike seemed skeptical. Lamoral sipped cognac. "When you grow up like I did, in a place like this, you want to know what you're really capable of. You want to do something that you can accomplish not because of money or training, but something that you can do for yourself. Because you want to know what you're made of, exclusive of the titles and chateaux and all that. In olden times, someone like me would just put on a suit of armor and go off to a crusade or something. But that isn't desirable any more, thank God, so I went up mountains instead."

"And you found out what you were made of."

"I did. And once I did, then I didn't have to do it any more."

She leaned toward him and gave a slight frown. "I sense a certain elision here, but I won't press it."

Mutely elided by all the most exquisite joys . . .

"Thank you." He stood. "I should get back to my guests."

She reached out, touched the watered silk ribbon. "What is this, exactly?"

He shrugged on his jacket. "Order of the Golden Fleece."

"And what did you do to get it?" Taking his arm.

"I'll be damned if I remember."

They laughed.

"I probably gave a lot to charity," Lamoral considered. "That's usually what you get these for nowadays. Good works."

"Better than beating people over the head with swords."

"Indeed yes." He raised his snifter. "To plowshares."

The crystal rang; they both drank deep. Linking arms, they headed for the ballroom.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You seem," he ventured, "not to be with Mohammed these days."

"He joined the Set, you see," thoughtfully. "And I found he became a lot less interesting once I realized I'd have to spend eternity with him."

"I sympathize."

"And you and Carolly?"

"Finished." Recalling her look at dinner.

"That was sudden."

"It's happened before. Less suddenly, but then we ought to be used to it."

"I sense another elision here." She took a breath. "Don't step on me when we dance tonight, Lamoral. You might be wrecking something."

"I'll take particular care."

And he did; the dance was very nice. He kissed her at the end of it, and then had to break up a brawl between Edwardes and Unger, who seemed to have uncovered a fundamental personality clash now that they were both soused on the same intoxicant. "I want to talk to you!" Edwardes said, as Lamoral hauled him away. Lamoral took his hands off the man, straightened his jacket, turned. "If you don't listen," Edwardes said darkly, "you're going to be sorry."

"To hell with you," Lamoral said.

"I'll be waiting outside," Edwardes said.

The ball went on, couples rotating in infinite profusion in the mirrors of the white spun-sugar ballroom, a diamond-perfect setting for the self-absorbed Set. Lamoral circulated, playing host. By and by the orchestra fell silent; the recorders were turned off, and people began drifting toward bed. Unger sat on the trestle-table, keeping the punch bowl company. Musicians packed their instruments. Carolly and Eurydike drifted about the cavernous white room, both waiting for Lamoral, somehow knowing better than to talk to each other.

Lamoral thanked the orchestra conductor for her efforts and shook, after a moment of hesitation, her lower right hand. He saw, over the conductor's shoulder, Indira Batish steaming out of the throne room, daggers shooting rapidfire from her eyes, and knew there was a crisis somewhere.

He crossed to the throne room door and opened it. A complex tangle of long, pale limbs were visible on the red-and-gold throne; it took some effort to sort them out into Alex and Kitsune. Kitsune was wearing the ribbon of Alex's Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus and not much else. Alex had Kitsune's diamond tiara hanging off one ear.

Lamoral carefully closed the door.

Did he hear Alex's laugh right then? Perhaps he did.

He saw Carolly speaking to one of the musicians, Eurydike talking to Unger. It occurred to him that it would be the height of gaucherie to treat Carolly as Alex had just treated Indira.

He winced. This was going to be a trying evening.

He'd have to tell Eurydike he'd be longer than he'd thought.

When, his face burning from Carolly's slap, he finally left the ballroom,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he saw Edwardes sprawled on the marble floor just outside the door, where he'd fallen asleep waiting to give Lamoral the benefit of his wisdom.

"The Hung Breakfast," Carolly said on entering, loud enough for everyone to hear. Unger and Darryl Wilson, both battling hangovers, winced. Kitsune, sharing Alex's corner of the table, laughed and offered brief applause.

It was before dawn; many of the Set had probably not slept at all. Lamoral and Eurydike certainly hadn't.

Lamoral had given careful orders about the amount of intoxicants permitted before the hunt. Just enough to take the edge off the hangovers, not enough to encourage carelessness with firearms.

Even so, he'd made sure that Unger and Edwardes were on the opposite end of the line from Alex and himself. If Edwardes decided to finally fight his duel with Alex, he'd have to thrash his way across half a league of underbrush before he ran into the spot of woods where Alex was placed. And the recorders would see everything.

But Edwardes hadn't appeared for breakfast. A footman told Lamoral he hadn't left his room.

Silverware clattered as the Hunt Breakfast was consumed. People in livery—in this informal setting, Lamoral had spared them the wigs—poured from silver Redfern coffee pots. Eurydike shrugged her right shoulder uncomfortably, trying to adjust the padding in her jacket—they would be using nineteenth and twentieth century weapons that didn't spare the recoil.

"I hope I don't break anything," she said.

"There's always a risk," Lamoral said. His jaw still ached where Carolly had hit him.

"That gun's so bloody heavy."

"Sorry. But they don't make modern weaponry for boar. And it would look bad—radar-homing smart bullets are hardly a sportsman's weapon."

"One of those four-armed guys could probably take one on hand-to-hand."

"Possibly, but my money's on the boar."

"Did you hear? The ex-mayor of Guadalajara committed suicide."

"Couldn't have happened to a nicer person." He thought about the Set's four-armed bouncers. "D'you suppose the Set had anything to do with it?"

"Everything, but not the way you mean. It's a media age, and one takes a chance insulting a media icon like the Set. He never got good coverage again, no matter what he did, and that destroyed his political career."

People finished their coffees. Lamoral stood up and announced it was time for the hunters to head for the hills.

"Good," Carolly said, rising and flinging back her cape with a gesture

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that made Lamoral's jaw ache all over again. "I'm in the mood to kill something."

Lamoral put on his hat and cape, then took his rifle from the rack on the wall and broke it open over one arm. It was a double-barreled top-break single-shot by Heym, dated 1892, with an elephant-ivory stock chased, by Fabergé, with silver. It was a lovely gun: modern plastic guns simply didn't have the elegance, let alone the perfect balance, of the fine old weapons.

Outside, the cheerful, chattering beaters were loading into vans. Mostly students, they were equipped with wicked boar-spears, the type with the T just below the point so the boar couldn't run himself up the length of the spear and attack the huntsman. They also wore bright red-and-blue tabards, which added to the medieval flare of the proceedings but which were principally designed to make certain no one mistook them for a boar—and even if someone did, the tabards were bulletproof. Standing around the courtyard, gamekeepers in green tufted caps and green loden capes tooted their horns experimentally.

The hunters gathered round—out of all the Party Set, there were only nineteen competent to bear arms, and the rest would cheer them on from the comfort of Schloss St. Emmeram. One of the gamekeepers carefully explained the rules of the hunt—they were elaborate, to assure none of the beaters or hunters getting shot—and then the keepers loaded into their cars and headed for the forest. The long limousines began to roll up, and Lamoral's guests headed for the game park.

Edwardes hadn't shown up.

During the drive to the forest dawn made an honest effort to appear, but largely failed. December frost limned the trees; the dark trunks were swathed in mist. Lamoral's breath paled out in front of him as he stood on the far right of the extended line of hunters and waited for the signal to begin. The scene was romantic and Teutonic as all hell: if he'd custom-ordered a day it couldn't be any better. The only anachronism, besides Darryl Wilson's white Stetson, was the silver-skinned Party Set VTO that settled onto the paved road behind them. It contained the two techs who controlled the recording equipment and the bug-zappers, which had cleared the woods of cameras and microphones.

A brisk horn signal echoed off the trees, was caught by the other horns and repeated. Lamoral felt his blood surge. Time to begin. Lamoral dropped a .470 Nitro Express slug into each barrel and snapped the breech shut, hearing the solid clunk of the Anson & Deeley action as it cocked the internal hammers. He made certain the safety was on. Some of the hunters made yipping noises as they stepped out from the starting line. Stupid, Lamoral thought, it would scare off the pigs.

Lamoral threw his cape back over his right shoulder and kept his eyes to the front. Mist and snow covered the ground in patches. The boar liked thick country and the underbrush was heavy. It would be all too easy to trip and fall; carrying a gun, that would be a bad idea. The beaters

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made distant whistling and rapping noises. Lamoral's careful footfalls released the scent of pine needles.

A booming shot: Lamoral's nerves leaped. Another, and another. Misses, Lamoral thought, all of them. Then there was another, deeper boom, and silence. The boar had been driven in front of another hunter, who had finished it.

Lamoral raised one foot to step over a fallen branch, then heard something rustle in front of him. He remained that way, one foot high, for a long second, then slowly lowered the foot to its original position and slid the safety off. He put the gun to the padded leather shoulder of his jacket and felt the coolness of the ivory cheekpiece against his face. Only when he was certain of his balance did he put his forefinger inside the trigger guard.

His senses strained into the mist. Something was rattling dead twigs out there, but it could be anything: a deer, someone's dog, a poacher caught in the middle of the landlord's hunt.

A bristling black shape raced out on short legs, saw him, spun on its hind trotters. Lamoral saw a flash of red eyes, of white ivory. His shot, all pure instinct, sent a ton of half-frozen snow cascading onto his hat from the tree overhead. He held his stance for a short moment while his senses caught up: snow, shot, numbed shoulder, dead pig. The slug had exploded the tusker's heart like a brick dropped on a snowball.

He removed his finger from the trigger guard, broke the gun, discarded the smoking cartridge, and stepped over the fallen branch. His heart gave a yip of triumph. The pig was an old male, its tusks chipped and yellow, and after the hunt was over the gamekeepers would blow a special horn salute to the monster, and send it on its way to Valhalla with a piece of fir between its teeth. Then a bit of pine branch would be dabbled in the creature's blood, and the pine placed in Lamoral's hatband—ceremonies that went back far beyond his family's appearance in Bavaria, back to the time when the Teutons worshipped Wotan and wore the skins of wolves, and Lamoral's own ancestors were inventing civilization back in the sunny hills of Lombardy.

Once he'd stepped over the branch, Lamoral reloaded and snapped the breech shut. Other shots rang through the woods, as did the keepers' calls. The beaters clattered closer. Lamoral moved forward, saw another pig, fired. This one took both barrels before it stopped moving.

Lamoral killed three more pigs in the next ten minutes. Firing was more or less continuous by now all along the line. Lamoral was reloading after the last when he saw movement on his left, back behind a clump of bracken. He cautiously raised his gun, his finger still outside the trigger guard, and was thankful for his own caution when he saw, over the simple sight, a man's tufted hat. Someone had strayed off his assigned turf.

The man moved, and Lamoral saw an intent black profile. Edwardes.

Lamoral's mouth went dry. Edwardes shouldn't be here at all.

The singer disappeared behind another clump of fern. Lamoral glanced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back over one shoulder, in the direction of civilization, and tried to decide what to do. He could creep back to the starting point and safety, but what if Edwardes weren't looking for him? What if he was stalking Alex, who was the next hunter to Lamoral's right?

This should all be visible to the techs in the VTO. He wondered if they were summoning help.

Lamoral saw violent movement as Edwardes drove his big body through a clump of bushes. The tenor was making a lot of noise: he clearly wasn't used to this. Lamoral could probably track him by ear.

He crouched down low and slipped after. There was a fusillade of shots off on the left. Lamoral found the big man's tracks, followed carefully. Ahead Edwardes loomed, silhouetted for a moment against a white sheet of mist, and then the mist absorbed him.

Lamoral slid forward into a tangle of bracken and waited. Something crunched ahead of him. It sounded as if Edwardes was doubling back. Lamoral raised his gun, softly eased off the safety, put his finger inside the trigger guard. Waited. Ferns waved just ahead. Edwardes was only feet away.

Suddenly, to his astonishment, Lamoral was face-to-face with a huge black sow. His nerves shrieked. His finger twitched on the first trigger, but he stopped himself from firing just in time. The sow gave a squeal of rage and dashed off to the right, beating down ferns as it went.

Lamoral's heart thrashed in his throat. He waited a moment or two while he got his terror under control. Then he crept forward and found himself in a stand of young pine, with Edwardes in plain sight twenty yards away, his rifle at port arms, breathing out mist. The beaters were banging trees with their spears just a short distance away. The hunt was nearly over.

Lamoral put the bushy trunk of a tree between him and Edwardes. It was barely possible, he supposed, that Edwardes was here by accident. He very much wanted to believe that was the case.

Hunting horns rang through the woods. They were calling an end to the shooting: the beaters and huntsmen were getting too close to each other for the shooting to safely continue.

Lamoral put his rifle to his shoulder, but kept the barrels depressed. He had the drop on the man; he'd call out to him and convince him to lower his weapon.

He had to move out around the lower branches of the pine for a clear view, and as he did so Edwardes turned and saw him. Lamoral could see Edwardes' eyes widening with shock; and then the big man threw up his gun and fired.

Lamoral flung himself behind the bole of the tree, onto the ground. Somehow his own gun didn't go off. Edwardes' bullet made a horrible buzzsaw sound as it passed overhead. Edwardes worked the bolt of his rifle and sent another .458 round after the first.

Lamoral could taste dead leaves in his mouth. He crawled back away from the tree, holding his gun carefully so the triggers wouldn't catch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on something and set it off by mistake. He could hear Edwardes crashing through undergrowth out in front of him somewhere.

The keepers were blowing their horns insistently at this breach of discipline. The hunt was *over*, dammit! Lamoral found some cover behind a fallen tree and waited. Something wet and cold was seeping through the leather knees of his trousers.

"Lamoral, was that you?"

Edwardes' voice echoed from the trees. Lamoral pointed his rifle in the direction of its likely point of origin.

"Lamoral, I'm sorry I shot at you! We've got to talk!"

The trained voice seemed to be coming from everywhere. Lamoral could hear twigs snapping off on his right. He pointed his gun that way.

"The recording techs are dead!" Edwardes bellowed. "Nobody's seeing this! I didn't mean to shoot at you, Lamoral!"

Damn, it sounded as if the voice was coming from the left. Lamoral swung the muzzles of his gun around, stuck his head up above the fallen tree in hopes of seeing something.

A gun went off, close by. The horrible whizzing sound of a heavy-caliber bullet wailed overhead, seemingly right to left. Lamoral ducked down, swung his rifle to the right again and saw Alex standing on the edge of a deadfall, silhouetted plainly against a patch of mist, his rifle half-raised. He knew Edwardes couldn't miss seeing Alex if he was standing anywhere nearby.

"Edwardes!" Lamoral shouted, and rose to his feet. Something moved in front of him and he fired both barrels at it, then ducked and ran off to the left. Edwardes popped up right in front of him, not at all where he expected. Edwardes' rifle was raised to his shoulder. Lamoral dived behind a tree, scrabbling at a bed of pine needles as Edwardes' bullet ploughed up dirt two meters away. Lamoral rolled frantically, trying to hang onto his gun; and then there was another shot and the horrid sound of a bullet striking flesh, and as Lamoral rolled out from behind the tree he saw Edwardes dead, fallen back against a stump, arms outflung, a red cavern centered on his massive chest.

Lamoral rose from the bed of needles, his head swimming. Alex stood on his eminence, a wisp rising from his gun-barrel.

"Do you mean to tell me he was trying to kill *you?*" he asked.

Lamoral stared at the body. Words wouldn't come.

Through the trees came the belated thrashing of their rescuers.

Eurydike had shot two pigs, but the recoil from the Perugini-Visini over-and-under had made her shoulder ache, so she'd returned to the starting point and gone to the VTO to watch the proceedings on video. Once there, she found both techs shot in the head, the pistol lying on the control console next to them, and all the recordings erased. She ran to one of the huntsmen, got him to blow the call that ended the hunt, then rounded up a party to head for the continuing sound of gunfire. Police VTO flooded the place minutes afterwards.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It was an old gun that shot the techs," reported the police commissaire. "A Walther P-38. There were no fingerprints on the gun or bullets, but our computers traced the registry to you."

"The pistol was in the gun room," Lamoral said. His breastbone had a hollow, inexplicable ache; he clutched Eurydike to himself as if she were a compress and spoke through a filter of her black hair. "People were in and out all the time, choosing rifles for the hunt; anyone could have taken it."

"We'll have to charge you for being careless with the pistol, then," the commissaire said, making a satisfied note on his portable computer-recorder. He either didn't have the eye/ear implants or lacked Helmsley's style.

"Really, commissaire," said Alex, "they were our *guests*." He was sitting on a fallen tree, watching two policewomen bagging up his rifle in plastic.

"Hospitality," with a businesslike smile, "does not include handing out guns to shoot one another."

"Telephone for you, highness." It was one of the huntsmen. Lamoral took the portable phone and identified himself.

"This is Claudius. Do we start the takeover attempt?"

Lamoral tried to clear his head. Would the public consider this his disaster, or the Set's?

Mary Maude Mullen had allowed two killers into the Set. That would have to be the line.

"Go ahead," he said. "Announce it immediately."

"Not tomorrow? I've already started getting calls from members of the syndicate; they're very nervous."

"Now. Edwardes killed Cao Cao, and he tried to kill me. It's time for some changes."

"Yes. Very well." A sigh. "I'll have to rewrite the press release."

"You'll know the line to take."

"Yes. It will take a few hours or so for the announcement to be ready."

"In the meantime, prod the syndicate to buy. Shares will be dropping."

"Very good."

"I'll be there when I can."

He gave the phone back to the keeper. Eurydike was looking up at him with a puzzled frown.

"What's happening?" she said.

"A proxy fight for control of the Set."

"You picked a hell of a time to start one."

He looked at Alex, the busy police, the rifles wrapped in a miniature version of the plastic sack that contained Edwardes' mortal remains.

"I think I've been in one for a long time," he said.

The takeover bid failed, though it came within an ace of success: Mary Maude Mullen and her board squeaked by after agreeing to more thorough psychological screening and to pay more attention to Adjustment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lamoral and his syndicate retired with grace and greenmail. Everybody made money, and so all was more or less forgotten, if not precisely forgiven.

A few Set-weeks later, Claudius died and was replaced by his son Miguel, a soft-spoken, soft-handed stranger. Two Set-months after that, Miguel "retired"—Lamoral was never clear why, or to what—and was replaced by a fine-boned woman, Marie, who was named after that poet-asting ancestress to whom Rilke dedicated his *Elegies*.

And two Set-months after that, Gstaad was reported to be in fashion again, after spending a half-century out of it, and thither went the Party Set for midwinter, to spend the day on the slopes and the night watching bonfires kindled on every peak, like lighthouses for Zeppelins cruising at low altitude, lost and looking for home.

"How were the slopes?"

Eurydike wasn't at her best on skis; she'd spent the day cutting arabesques across the perfect ice of the skating rink.

"Curiously bare," said Lamoral, "but lovely. I wonder if Set security cleared everybody out."

"There weren't many on the rink, either. Or in this hotel."

"Ratings are up, anyway." Carrying his orange-juice-and-champagne, Lamoral joined her on the low sunken couch around the wood fire. A few other Set people chatted, drifted, drank, waiting for sunset and dinner.

Lamoral took a low, flat box out of his jacket pocket. "A gift," he said.

"Another one? Thank you. I'm really not deserving of all this, you know . . ." Her voice drifted off as she opened the box and saw the star, flashing with diamonds and brilliants, sitting atop its coiled ribbon.

"It's the Order of the Black Eagle and of Skanderbeg," Lamoral said helpfully. "There will have to be a formal investiture later, of course, but I thought you'd like to see it."

She looked at him with a baffled expression. "I didn't know you could give these away."

"I didn't. The presentation will be made by King Sulejman II of Albania and Kosovo. Of course he's only the *pretender* to Kosovo, but . . ."

"Albania?"

"It seems you've done a lot of good works in Albania."

"Albania? I don't remember—"

"Or someone," with a straightfaced smile, "has done them in your name."

Comprehension dawned. "Ah."

"And of course, at the same time, there will be a coronation. You're to be Princess of the Ghegs."

Her eyes narrowed. "Don't the Ghegs, whoever they are, have anything to say about this?"

Lamoral sipped his mimosa. Champagne foamed pleasantly at the base of his tongue. "You're a heroine to the Ghegs, my dear. After all you've done for them, the Dinarics ring with your praises."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You'll have to remind me sometime what exactly it is I've done."

"After that last earthquake, they've got a lot to be grateful for, believe me. I think making you royalty is the very least they could do."

"Royalty," Eurydike said. Her expression grew grim. "I begin to perceive a purposeful drift in all this. How is the *Almanach de Gotha* going to rate this peerage of mine?"

"Normally," Lamoral said, "they don't rate modern titles highly, but it seems that research has also been done into your forebears."

"I was *assembled*. I don't *have any* . . ."

"On the Apostolidis side, old Basil turns out to have been descended from three Byzantine emperors, notably Alexius I Comnenus, as well as the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamet I. On the Ichimonji side—well, did you know old Ichiro was from a noble family?"

"He never told me."

"He goes back to the twelfth century. Your ancestors, in fact, are far better than mine. Franz Taxis was just an Italian merchant, after all."

"Down on your knees, peasant swine," she said offhandedly, and then flushed bright red when he did exactly that.

"I realize the Order of the Black Eagle and Skanderbeg is hardly the traditional diamond ring . . ." he began.

"Get up." Turning away. "Don't do this to me."

"Yes, your highness." He rejoined his mimosa and regarded her from over its rim.

"I'll have to think about all of this."

"I believe we'll be seeing Sulejman in a couple Set-days. You can let him know if you're feeling sufficiently noble."

She looked at him. "This is just a game to you, isn't it?"

"Not entirely."

"You have to win at everything. Everything's tactics, like going up a mountain."

"Or proving a postulate."

Her brows knit. "You can't prove a postulate. It's a given."

"Proving a theorem, then." Irritated. "Whatever the hell you prove."

"If you'd won control of the Party Set, would you be so eager to take this tack?"

"We could still be prince and princess. We'd just be royalty here."

"I don't believe we've settled that I'm going to be princess of anything. I don't like getting caught in all this—" Her hands twisted in an invisible mesh. "This web of yours."

"We have nothing but time."

"You haven't left me many choices. Accept everything you've done, or reject it all." She was silent for a moment. "If I reject it, then what?"

"Then I'll make other plans."

"Would I be in them?"

"I don't know."

She put her arms around herself as if warding off a chill. "This is all so cold-blooded."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You wouldn't let me stay on my knees. That's supposed to be the romantic, warm-blooded part."

A half-smile crossed her face. "Okay. You've got me there." She shook her head. "What if the *Almanach de Gotha* decides all these arrangements are just too convenient? What if I'm a second, or third?"

"Didn't I mention . . .? About a decade ago, my grand-niece Marie bought the *Almanach de Gotha* for me. I can write in it what I damn well please."

Eurydike sighed and leaned back on the couch. "You have spun exceeding fine, Lamoral."

"I've had a half-century or more to make my plans. But if we drop out of the Set together, we'll live in realtime and you'll get to see me improvise."

She looked at him appraisingly. "I might look forward to that."

"I hope that's grounds for optimism."

"We'll see."

With that, she rose from her couch and strolled across the room to talk to Indira.

The decoration, in its case, was left on the sofa.

Lamoral pocketed it.

"My new composition," Wayne Unger said, "is called 'l'Amoral.' " He smiled. "With an apostrophe."

Lamoral, without the apostrophe, would just as soon have left the room. Instead he smiled politely and finished his dessert.

Unger's voice rose, embracing his audience. Someone in the know, Lamoral realized, had turned off the dining room's canned music.

Singular and duplicate,
A pillar of the ages takes voice—
Or is it the engendering ages
Who speak with such careful circumspection?
(*And the mountain stands beyond ethics.*)

Contriving his conquests
With rope and peg, the world
A rockface to be mounted, scarred
With the brutal crampons of ascent.
(*And the mountain stands outside of time.*)

Boar: a record kill today—
And so die all pretenders!
The brittle phalange of the Reaper crooks
To those who stand too near.
(*And the mountain stands forever.*)

The mountain is his protoplast.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His zygote has the germ of eminence.
But the mountain is rimed by frost.
And the mountain kills with a shrug.
(*And the mountain stands . . .*)

Carolly applauded briskly; Alex laughed so hard he almost slid under the table. Eurydike, across the table from Lamoral, gnawed her lip.

"I believe I'll have some more coffee," said Lamoral.

The waiter poured. Unger loomed closer. "Like it?" he said.

Lamoral thought for a moment. "I think you mixed your metaphor, Unger. I can't *climb* a mountain if I *am* a mountain, now can I?"

"I'd like to think of my metaphors as expandable."

"And I believe rime is salt and has nothing to do with frost."

Unger's face beamed delight. "Poetic license, dear boy!"

"Face it, Lamoral," called Kitsune gaily from the next table. "Unger's got your number." She had, to everyone's surprise, preempted Alex by tossing his shoes before he could toss hers, and had taken up with a new Set member named Tait Singh, leaving Alex uncharacteristically bereft of a companion.

"I'll work on it," Unger said. He patted Lamoral's shoulder. "I'll make it better. It was just an improvisation, after seeing Les Diablerets and the Wildhorn from the Dart this afternoon."

"I'll look forward to the next version. Though I'm no real judge of poetry."

"Come now. You inherited Rilke, after all."

"So I did." Lamoral sipped coffee. "If you want more inspiration, go look at a real killer mountain. Tell your Dart to get you a close look at the North Face of the Eiger. That's out by Grindelwald."

"That's one of yours, isn't it?"

"Mine and Alex's."

"Of course." Condescendingly. "Of course."

Radiating satisfaction, Unger headed in the direction of the bar. Lamoral called after him. "Are you going to do the Doyenne next?"

He saw, out of the corner of his vision, that Kitsune's eyes widened with interest. He smiled inwardly: if he planted that harpoon well enough, Unger might well have to perform.

He looked at Eurydike.

"Have you been talking to him?"

"Unger?" She shook her head. "No. Not recently."

"Your thoughts seem to be running in parallel."

Eurydike fiddled with her teaspoon. "Some opinions concerning you can be held in common."

"Am I growing that predictable? I should do something startling and break up the stereotype."

"Perhaps you should."

"What I would like to do, at the moment, is to take my coffee onto the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrace and enjoy the view. But people would assume I was leaving the room because I'm angry at Unger."

She looked at him curiously. "*Are* you angry at Unger?"

"Yes."

"Then why should you care if people know it?"

He sighed. "You're correct, of course. Will you join me?"

"Certainly."

Steam rose from their coffee, plumed from their noses. The fires atop Vanil Noir and the other peaks and prominences wouldn't be lit till midnight, and the valley was dark. Brittle starlight gleamed off high snowfields, and low-lying clouds stroked the slopes like cats rubbing themselves against someone's leg. Lamoral absorbed it all for a long, long moment.

He was aware of Eurydike watching him. He turned to her.

"So what happened up there?" He knew the *up there*, another mountain on the other side of the world.

"Changabang."

"Yes."

"I always thought Changabang sounded silly if you don't know what it means. Shining Mountain. Because it's white, and the other Himalayas are dark."

"I sense an elision coming on."

Lamoral gazed bleakly into the dark. "It was a stupid accident," he said. "If it weren't for a lot of wild coincidences, no one would have got hurt." Lamoral could taste it, the sudden jolt of fear, the swirl of vertigo, the urge to curl up and protect his head and neck, the final impact at the end . . .

"We hadn't got very far up the mountain, and the accident happened low down," he said. "A little over 19,000 feet. A place full of overhangs—Boardman and Tasker, who were the first up the West Wall in 1976, called it the Toni Kurz pitch, after a man who died on a similar place on the Eiger. Alex went first, working his way out under this overhang, and I was belaying him. Karl-August was below me, picking up surplus pitons so we could reuse them. He was attached to another line altogether. Alex planted a peg under this giant overhang, put a running belay on it, then worked his way around the other side and up. He was out of my sight, but that wasn't unusual. Once he got around the overhang he planted an ice piton there, in some old black ice that had been sitting there since the dawn of time, and shouted for me to follow.

"I went out along the rope with a jumar—it's this ratchetlike thing that attaches you to the rope, so you can follow the pioneer and not worry about falling off. But when Alex went off ahead he left his pack with me so that he'd have more freedom to get up that difficult pitch, and I was carrying my own pack as well, so that meant that between the two packs I weighed about forty kilos more than he did, and that first peg under

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the overhang just pulled right out—it supported Alex all right, but not me.

"And *that* normally would have been okay, because the line was still pegged on either end, except that it wasn't—" Lamoral paused, trying to figure out a way to explain it. "When I was jumaring after him, Alex decided he didn't like the looks of his last peg, so he gave it a final tug, and it tore right out of that old rotten ice. So he quickly drove in another peg in a more secure place, and detached himself from the line and clipped himself to the new peg, and he was right on the verge of clipping the line to the new peg when I tore the *other* peg out of the rock face, and my weight ripped the line right out of Alex's hands . . . so now there was nothing supporting me on that end, and I fell."

Eurydike watched him, her face in shadow. "Were you hurt?"

"No. The pegs on the other end held, and I was wearing a helmet. I dropped about twenty meters and then the line caught me. I swung like a pendulum across the rock face, and I balled myself up. At the end of my swing I hit Karl-August. I hit him with my helmet, and the force of it broke his back. He died a few hours later."

There was a moment of silence, then Eurydike let out a long sigh. Lamoral realized she'd been holding her breath.

"How did Alex get down?" she asked.

"Getting down mountains is a lot easier than getting up. Once he was above the overhangs, all he had to do was drive in some pitons and abseil down to where I was, using one of the other ropes he was carrying. He and I were both with Karl-August at the end." Lamoral looked up at Vanil Noir and remembered leaving Karl-August behind, mummied in his sleeping bag and hanging from a half-dozen lines, swaying in the wind below the Toni Kurz pitch until someone could come in a VTO and bring home the body. Lamoral had cut the Austrian flag Karl-August wore on his outer jacket and carried it back as a remembrance. "All I had was a stiff neck from the impact," he said. "I walked around in a collar for a month. That was all."

"I've never seen anyone die." Eurydike shivered. "I ran out on the war, then joined the Set. Edwardes' was the only body I've ever seen."

"They do seem to collect around me." Grimly. "Unger was right about that."

"And I ran out on the implications of my own work. I could see what was going to happen once we worked out the *n*-dimensional business, and I didn't want to deal with it. I badly wanted to be someplace else."

He looked at her in surprise. "What are the implications, then?"

She hesitated, then shook her head. "You wouldn't believe me."

Eurydike put her coffee down on the rail, stepped up to him, put her arms around him. Her head nestled against his shoulder.

Another body, Lamoral thought. He was thankful this one was warm.

Up high the beacons were leaping from peak to peak, like alarums out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Walter Scott. The Party Set hung on the terrace, gazing up, watching the fires in silence.

On the other end of the building, under the pale floodlights of the skating rink, elevated on one blade tip, Eurydike spun slowly, her chin sweeping perilously close to the ice. Lamoral watched and warmed himself with a glass of brandy. A bugzapper sat on a table nearby, driving off eavesdroppers.

She straightened; her other blade touched ice. Eurydike pushed off, came slowly toward him.

"I've decided something," she said.

"So have I."

She smiled. "You first."

"I've decided that elisions are out for the season. I'm going to climb Changabang."

"Good. Evasions are going out with elisions. I've decided that I'm going to be Princess of the Ghegs."

"I'm pleased for you."

"The Party Set was another way of running away. I'm done with that."

He kissed her, then lowered his voice. "I've likewise decided that I'm not making the climb a Party Set event. I want to do it quietly. It's not for popular consumption, it's just something I want to do. The Party Set can find out about it afterward."

She looked at him carefully. "Is Alex going up with you?"

"That's up to him."

"Not to hear him tell it."

Lamoral smiled. "You can't *make* someone climb a mountain. Alex likes to complain, but he's really a very good mountaineer. Better than me, actually."

Eurydike was amused. "For once you and he agree on something."

"I'm a fairly dull climber. Very organized, very logical, very proper. Alex is lazy and careless about some things, like making correct bivouacs or cooking meals, but on the rock face he can get inspired. He's done things that would have terrified me, and done them brilliantly."

"He's never struck me as the nerves-of-steel type."

Lamoral gave a ritual sigh. "He's got a lot of fine characteristics, but he's never applied himself properly."

"Cliché, Lamoral."

"Cliché, but true. To be a noble younger son is to be a cliché, and that is unfortunate."

She put her arm on his. "Then we'll only have one son, Lamoral. The rest, daughters."

"Whatever you say," smiling, "your highness."

"The Party Set has bagged its second royal."

"Say rather," another wag, "it's created its first!"

The Party Set was delighted with Eurydike's investiture—along with the Nobel, she was providing excuses for the Party Set to be spontaneous,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and anyway reasons to visit Albania were few. The festivities were delightful, and Eurydike's bodyguard of Ghegs, with their red hats, mustachios, and antique, much-loved Lee-Enfields, had the proper resonance of color and menace. Afterwards, as the Set went off to its cold bunkers, Eurydike, Lamoral, and Alex flew to Regensburg.

Alex had agreed to the climb with surprising lack of fuss. Perhaps Kitsune's rejection had left him feeling at loose ends. Eurydike had been ennobled in mid-August, and Lamoral planned for a month's climbing and conditioning in Bavaria, moving to India in mid-September, making a long hike to the base of Changabang to accustom himself and Alex to the altitude, then beginning the assault on Changabang around the first of October. The schedule would give about two weeks to climb the mountain before the monsoon arrived and made the whole thing impossible.

Research was done into modern mountaineering techniques. Some were useful—laminated polymerized crampons, built into the boot and spring-loaded, which not only got rid of the tedious business of taking them on and off but eliminated the problem of a metal crampon conducting cold into the boot. Some of the new techniques were useful, but declined: self-contained *n*-dimensional bivouacs, containing food, clothing, heat, and beds, struck Lamoral as decadent.

Lamoral and Alex hiked and climbed throughout the day. They had the forests and mountains almost to themselves. Even Regensburg seemed to have few people on the streets.

"People are leaving," Marie said. "There is much opportunity elsewhere."

"Where?"

A shrug. "Off the planet." Lamoral had the feeling she didn't particularly care.

They climbed in solitude. Lamoral began to enjoy the isolation of the slopes. He remembered the Alps as being packed with climbers.

"Your schedule doesn't leave much room for error," said Alex, looking at his pocket calendar. He was perched on the desk in Lamoral's office in the old monastery, surrounded by pictures of mountains. Eurydike half-reclined on an old chair in the corner, reading an ancient magazine.

"Einmal jedes," Lamoral said, "nur einmal. Einmal und michtmer." Eurydike frowned, mentally translating. Just once, everything, only for once. Once and no more.

Rilke, of course.

Alex looked at Lamoral quizzically. "This makes *twice*, Lamoral." Eurydike laughed.

"We haven't climbed it yet. We're only going to do that once."

"Whatever you say."

"I'm taking something of Karl-August's with me. I'm going to leave it up there."

Alex nodded. "I like that."

"Vidcom for you, sir." The voice of a footman came out of the intercom.

The caller was a dark-skinned man with a clipped mustache and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

military uniform. "I am Squadron Leader Daram-Louis Ram, your serene highness. I wished to speak to you regarding your application to climb Changabang."

Lamoral aimed a pleased look at Alex. "I am at your service, squadron leader."

"The Government of the Southwest Asian Coalition is pleased to grant your application, your highness. I have been assigned as your liaison officer."

"In that case, please call me Lamoral."

The officer grinned. "Call me Louis, then."

"We were hoping to fly into Lata next month, and walk to Changabang from there."

"That will be suitable. If you will inform me of the date, I will meet you there." Louis looked at Lamoral carefully. "Sir," he said, "I am rated an expert climber. I would like to accompany you up the West Wall."

Lamoral's eyes flicked to Alex, who shook his head, then back to the screen. "I don't know how possible that is," he said.

"I have been up Changabang before, though we went up the Southwest Ridge, not the West Face. I have also been to the top of Everest, climbed the South Face of Annapurna, and have made two attempts at K2." Louis smiled. "Those, alas, were not blessed by success."

"I'm impressed, Louis," Lamoral said. "But I'll have to consult with the other half of my expedition." Alex, perched behind the comm unit, was still vigorously shaking his head.

"Much depends on chemistry," Louis said. "I understand that."

"And we plan to make a classical ascent. No radios, no television, no bivouacing in the *n*th dimension. And we carry all supplies from the base camp on our backs. No porters once we begin, no caching stuff from a VTO."

"I would be most enthusiastic to agree to those conditions, Lamoral."

Lamoral began to have a good feeling about the man. "I'll be in touch, then."

"I will be looking forward."

"I don't like it," Alex said. "I thought this was going to be just the two of us."

Eurydike looked at them from over her magazine. "What exactly do you need an liaison officer for, anyway?"

Lamoral swiveled his chair. "The Indian—Southwest Asian —government insists on it. He's there to make certain you don't break any laws and that you climb the mountain that you're supposed to."

Eurydike seemed amused. "Is that a problem?"

"Sometimes. Nanda Devi's been closed for a couple of centuries at least, and we're going to be just in the next valley."

"Why?"

"Because Nanda Devi is holy—she's not just a mountain, she's a goddess. In addition to the Indian Army, she's guarded by seven rishis who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

live in the Rishi Ganga, and her Sancturary has been off-limits for a very long time. Pilgrims walk hundreds of miles to get a glimpse of her."

Eurydike seemed amused. "You weren't planning on sneaking up Nanda Devi while no one was looking, were you?"

"And drive every Hindu and Buddhist fanatic into a homicidal rage? No, thank you."

"We never saw Nanda Devi on our former journey," Alex added. "She was hidden in cloud the entire time."

Lamoral thought about that. "The Goddess turned her back on us that trip."

Alex was silent. Eurydike watched them with interest.

Lamoral swiveled his chair toward his computer. "Let's find out about this Daram-Louis," he said.

What he discovered was impressive. The officer was only twenty-six and had been on a major climbing expedition every year since he was seventeen. He'd been the only survivor of the advance party on the first K2 expedition, and gone on to attempt the mountain again the next year, when bad weather drove him back just short of the summit.

"Looks as if he's good."

"He won't be Karl-August," said Alex.

Which was perfectly true.

At noon the clouds streamed away like something in a fast-motion video, and the sun blazed off the white granite fang of the Shining Mountain. The increase in brightness gave an almost hallucinatory quality to the 17,000-foot meadow where they had pitched their tents—each grass spear was sharply outlined, each wildflower a ball of flame. Changabang's snaking plume of snow, old monsoonfall torn off its horns by sixty-knot winds, gleamed like powdered silver. Lamoral could see a VTO threading the gap between Kalanka and the Rishi Kot like a shining needle, and knew it was Eurydike coming with their supplies.

In the old days they would have had to hire dozens of porters to trek the stuff in. It was lucky the VTOs could land on the Base Camp's meadow: aside from Louis, Lamoral hadn't seen a single human being since his arrival in India, not even in Lata, not even a hermit or a pilgrim on his way to the Goddess. Maybe, he thought, they flew to the Sanctuary in giant aerial buses. Even the bugzappers hadn't found a hidden camera or microphone since leaving Albania.

Clouds still wrapped Nanda Devi, a shroud of darkness on the otherwise bright horizon. Lamoral turned his eyes away from it. He did not want to assign those clouds any significance.

Louis was melting snow for their luncheon of fruit drink and porridge. Lamoral walked farther out onto the silver-edged grass and gestured for Alex to join him.

"Louis is going to have to join us," he said.

"Damn it, Lamoral!"

"He's good. He's amiable, even when you're being unpleasant, and he's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked all these miles with us from Lata and made our life a lot easier by doing most of the actual work."

"Yes, I'll concede that. But he's—I don't know—gone away somewhere most of the time. He's drifting."

"He seems to be efficient enough when he's actually doing something. *I'm* not going to tell him he can't climb."

"Don't I have a say in this?"

"Yes. But if you tell him, make sure you tell him it's your decision alone, that it's your refusal, not ours, not mine."

Alex's bearded face was sullen. "Damn you anyway. Everything's always got to be arranged your way."

"Here's Eurydike." Turning away.

He knew Alex would never tell Louis on his own.

The VTO came to a landing on a bed of starry, violet flowers. Eurydike had brought, from Schloss St. Emmeram, an old chased-silver flask full of coffee. She poured for herself and Lamoral, but the boiling point was so low at this altitude that half of it steamed away before they could drink. The remains were so strong as to be unpalatable.

Eurydike tasted and made a face. "I brought a picnic lunch for four," she said. "At least *that* won't boil away."

"Fresh vegetables, I hope."

She stepped out from the lee of the VTO and winced in the sudden light of Changabang. "That's the one you're going up, isn't it?"

"It's the only white mountain here."

"It's vertical!"

Lamoral smiled. "That's rather the point." He pointed, one by one, at the other peaks. "Purbi Dunagiri. Dunagiri. Rishi Pahar, Hardeol, Tursuli. Rishi Kot, where the demigods live. Hunaman the Monkey God. Kalanka the Destroyer."

"I hope these names aren't to be taken literally."

"I hope so, too." There was a boom and Eurydike gave a little jump. She turned and saw a white lace curtain dropping with infinite grace down Changabang's face, its edges curling in the tearing winds.

"Avalanche?" she said.

"Yes. But there's not much snow in it. Changabang's so steep it doesn't collect snow for long."

She looked at him sharply. "Is that supposed to be a consolation?"

"It's not a life-threatening avalanche. We could hang on very well through something like that. And have. I'm a lot more worried about rocks."

She looked around the meadow, the late flowers dancing between the white arms of glaciers. "I keep thinking what the Party Set would turn this into. White tablecloths, servants in turbans, an orchestra, a special surprise appearance by a famous yogi . . ."

"And Unger would write another damned poem about snow." He looked at her. "One doesn't want that, does one?"

"No. I'm relieved they're not here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You've lived outside the Set for two months. How do you find it?"

"Lonely." Her expression was disturbed. "There's no one out there. The whole planet has been largely depopulated, and most of those left are . . . not at home, somehow. Pleasant, polite, but absent. Like your grand-niece."

Lamoral thought about Louis. The Indian climber fit the description as well: harmless, pleasant, but somehow lacking, despite his record, the cold gritty edge of determination he had come to expect from serious climbers.

" 'I have lost my passion,' " Lamoral said, " 'why should I need to keep it/Since what is kept must be adulterated?' "

"What was that?"

"*Gerontion*. A favorite of Unger's. I was wondering aloud if perhaps the human race has lost all its passion."

She shuddered. "That would make us—the Set—the last of the old breed."

"One wonders why they'd find us interesting. Yet our ratings are up."

"My thoughts of retirement from the Set never included taking up residence among somnambulists."

"After the climb we'll do some exploration. Of the humans around us."

Eurydike grimaced. "Either the Party Set or taking up residence in early Eliot. Not a choice I relish."

" 'More than ever the things we live with are falling away.' "

Eurydike grinned. "You've got to stop quoting Rilke every time you need something profound to say. People will think you unoriginal."

"They've never thought that of Unger."

"Let's have our picnic."

"Let's."

That night the VTO rose into the night, its brief fires flickering off Changabang's horns. *The hardness of life*, Lamoral thought, *the long experience of love . . . but then, under the stars, what then? The more deeply untellable stars?*

The Shining Mountain stood, like one of the *Elegies*' titanic, unknowable Angels, above the meadow.

Tomorrow they would begin to climb it.

The final morning they woke at five and warmed snow to cook their breakfast porridge. At dawn they left their tents and bags behind on the ledge, made a long, horizontal, slightly ascending traverse, and jumared up a long groovelike crack pioneered the afternoon before. Afterwards was a long free climb, no more pegs or fixed ropes, just the one rope the three shared between them. The last three hundred meters were right in the mountain's plume, the fifty-knot wind flinging in their faces a million ice crystals, little stinging rainbows.

And then they stepped out of the plume and were at the same instant on the summit. It was two in the afternoon. The journey had taken eleven

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

days, most consumed in portering their supplies in relays up the lower slopes.

Lamoral was too tired to spend much time in congratulating himself. He triggered his helmet camera to take some pictures, the only ones he'd taken, and all for the sole purpose of proving they'd been there—he considered there were already too many pictures of exhausted, grinning climbers stupidly waving ice axes on one summit or another.

Only now did he remember to look at the view. To the east he could see into Nepal, a line of white crests stretching away forever; and away north, past Kalanka and Purbi Dunagiri, the mountain peaks marched off into Tibet. There was a clouded darkness there creeping over the ridges, signaling a storm that would probably strike Changabang about midnight.

Lamoral didn't look toward Nanda Devi. He knew its twin peaks were still covered in cloud.

Louis was singing a prayer and scattering candy for the gods. Alex was lost in the view. Lamoral opened a pocket on his overcoat and took out something he'd prepared, a small stone he'd picked up in the Alps wrapped in an Austrian flag, the one Karl-August Hormayr had on his jacket when he died.

What was Austria now? A district in the European Union, last he'd heard, but that had been decades ago. Before the war. Perhaps by now Austria, or the Union, was one with Nineveh and Tyre.

Alex was looking restless.

Lamoral buried the flag in the snow, then stood for a moment and looked at the whiteness and failed entirely to think of something profound to say or do.

Time to go down. Lamoral cleaned the ice out of his crampons—metal ones would have been worn to nubbins by now—and began his descent. As it was, they would probably not reach the bivouac before dark.

Descending through the plume was worrying, stepping cautiously downhill with only limited visibility. One mistake on someone's part could drag all three off a precipice. But soon they were out of the plume and plunging down through the snow like schoolboys. After that was a careful Alpine descent that took them to the top of the fixed ropes and the long crack that dropped them down a significant fraction of the West Wall.

"I'm feeling fit," Alex said. "I'll go last and pick up the ropes."

Lamoral looked at him. In spite of the little fuel cell that fed refined oxygen inside the face mask of Lamoral's helmet, he was panting for breath. "Are you sure?"

"Just have a nice hot drink waiting for me at Camp Three."

"I'll do that."

Louis went first, his bright yellow helmet disappearing down the long, cold gully; and then Lamoral retracted his laminated crampons, clipped on his descendeur, and followed. Halfway down the groove was a bend that snaked around an overhang—a nasty little five-hundred-kilo flake

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that seemed to be held to the mountainside only by a couple of patches of thin, black, primeval ice. Lamoral carefully avoided touching the flake on his way down, not wanting to drop it on Louis's head.

Lamoral could see Louis waiting on the ledge at the bottom of the gulley, faceplate up, munching a piece of chocolate and enjoying the view. There was hammering from above—maybe Alex was putting in a more secure peg.

And then Lamoral felt something through his line—a vibration, a tautening, something *not right*—and he looked up to see the half-ton flake coming down.

"Rock!" he yelled, and jumped to one side, swinging clear out of the gully—suddenly, with the flake gone, there was more slack in the rope —and the flake bounded past in a chaos of snow and rattling black peb ble-ice. Lamoral smashed onto the rock face at the end of his swing and, bouncing back into the gully, saw Louis look up just in time to perceive the stone that killed him.

Lamoral could hear crashes as the flake continued its progress down the West Wall. The gully was full of rushing rubble that bounced off Lamoral's shoulders and helmet. Lamoral ignored it and dropped to where Louis was lying, his body still harnessed to the rope.

Dead, of course, his head caved in.

Which, Lamoral perceived, revealed the machinery within.

His mouth went dry. He clipped a karabiner to the next line, the one that made the long descending traverse, unfixed his descendeur from the vertical line, and bent to examine the body.

Daram-Louis Ram was not human. The flesh was real enough, but what was beneath was all metal alloy bones, bright plastic tendons, silver circuitry.

Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.

Boots scrabbled above him. Lamoral looked up and saw Alex coming down, looking over his shoulder.

"Are you all right? That flake—"

"Louis is dead."

"Damn."

Alex braked about five meters above Lamoral's head. He took off one mitten, revealing the heavy glove underneath, then opened his jacket and began feeling for something inside.

Lamoral searched for words. "There's something wrong here, Alex."

Alex took out a small pistol, cocked it, pointed it in Lamoral's direction.

Lamoral let go of the mountain and jumped straight back.

Next thing he knew he was upside-down and moving very rapidly. The rock face scraped the hell out of him even through his heavy clothes. He was only clipped to the line by the one karabiner and his body bouncing against the mountain was more of a brake than the single ring. If Alex fired he didn't hear it.

Lamoral came to a jarring stop at a peg, one placed halfway along the traverse. Somewhat to his surprise, none of his equipment broke.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lamoral reached for the rope, tilted himself upright. He could feel blood running down his knees and elbows. Off on his right, about twenty meters, he saw Alex making a far more controlled descent to the ledge. Alex needed both hands to control his equipment and had put the pistol away.

But not for long, Lamoral presumed. He clipped his descendeur onto the next length of line and kicked off.

This time there really was a shot. The bullet whizzed off rock, and then Alex was out of sight behind a bulge of white granite.

The rope ended at the next peg. Lamoral was at their previous night's bivouac. Lamoral fixed himself to the next rope, then unclipped the first rope from its peg and let it fall.

Let Alex bridge *that* one.

The dangling rope began to zoom upward quickly. Evidently Alex was on the length between the middle peg and the shelf, and his weight was dragging the now-loose rope through the karabiner on the peg. It wouldn't come free: the rope was knotted at both ends to prevent just that. Alex wouldn't fall; he'd just have a long jumar back up to the ledge.

That gave Lamoral time to pack a tent, a pair of sleeping bags, and some rations. He kicked the rest of the gear over the edge—a straight drop of almost a thousand feet to the icefield below—then abseiled down the next line, unknotted the double rope and collected it.

The next abseil took him out of the sun. It was going to be dark and cold very soon. Lamoral thought about it as he collected the next rope.

Alex had no sleeping gear or other supplies: he'd have to spend the night on the mountain, and there was a storm coming on. Even though there were heating elements in his climbing suit, he'd probably be frozen to the rock face by dawn.

There was, however, a tent at Camp Two, on the ice field below. If Alex could reach that he could survive.

All this assumed that Alex wasn't like Louis, that he wasn't made out of machinery that could survive very well in the storm that was coming.

Lamoral suspected he was. Alex had been replaced, like Louis, and when Lamoral discovered Louis' secret, Alex tried to kill him.

The problem of who had done the replacing could wait.

The wind was picking up. The air was full of spindrift and Lamoral was beginning to shiver. He couldn't feel his toes at all. He turned on the heating units in his climbing suit, gloves, and boots.

Lamoral began his next abseil while trying to decide what to do. He still hadn't made up his mind at the bottom, so he retrieved the rope and threw it over the edge—the two he carried were quite enough for getting down the mountain.

It was getting very dark. If the mountain itself hadn't been white he couldn't have seen where he was putting his feet.

That last abseil had taken him to the bottom of the series of fixed ropes. From here he could reach the ice field in a few easy abseils, and from there it was a long march down the middle third of the mountain,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after which another set of fixed ropes would aid his descent to Camp One.

He fixed his anchor for the next abseil, then flung a doubled rope out into the darkness and began his descent. Near the bottom there was a convenient ledge; he paused here, retrieved the rope, and started driving a pair of pitons for another anchor.

"Hey, Lamoral!"

The sound of Alex's voice scared him witless. In an instant he was standing with his back to the rock face, ice axe poised.

"Don't worry, I can't see you. I think I'm over to your right, on the other side of that overhang. Remember that dead-end chimney you pioneered? I abseiled down it. It was an impossible way up, but a very fast way down."

Alex's voice was a shout against the rising wind. Lamoral raised his faceplate and looked frantically left and right. Blown snow stung his face. He began to hear the sound of hammering.

"Bet I can make it to Camp Two before you can!" Cheerfully.

Lamoral tried to decide whether or not it would be wise to reply. In the end he decided it didn't matter. Alex couldn't get to him without giving him plenty of time to react.

"What are you?"

Alex's voice stayed buoyant. "Not a very successful murderer, it would seem. I keep hitting everyone but you!"

Vertigo eddied through Lamoral. He gripped the rock face.

"What do you mean?"

The hammering paused. "Karl-August. Cao Cao. Edwardes. Now poor Louis. I never meant to hit any of them." Alex sounded aggrieved. "You have the devil's own luck, Lamoral. Always have had. If this goes on I'll have to kill off half our acquaintance."

If this was a machine, Lamoral thought, it was doing a damn good job of imitating Alex's style.

"Edwardes was trying to warn you, you know. *He* knew he wasn't the killer, whatever you thought. But he got drunk and overslept, and made it to the hunt late. He found you tracking him, and thought you were me, and took a shot at you. And *I* was tracking you also, hoping to shoot you with a pistol that had Unger's fingerprints all over the magazine—I saw him handling it the previous night. So I found myself having to save your life in order to preserve my neck. And the stupid police never found the extra gun on me."

"You killed the techs."

"For God's sake! I didn't want anything recorded, did I?" In a tone used to explain things to simpletons.

Lamoral turned to face the rock and peered upward, blinking snow off his lashes. He was losing feeling in his nose.

"Why are you doing this?" he said. Reaching upward, testing a handgrip.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"For strictly hedonistic reasons, of course. I want the money and the title. *And* all twenty-three castles."

"Perhaps we could reach an accommodation." Lamoral pulled his balaklava up over his mouth and nose, then lifted himself up by the handgrip. He wished he hadn't retrieved the damned rope.

"Come on, Lamoral! It's a little late to be bought off. And I'm tired of your gifts anyway—the Set most of all." Alex's hammering resumed.

Lamoral reached for another handgrip, pulled himself up, found another, pulled. "I think there might be reason for an alliance between us," he said. "Did you see Louis' body?"

The hammering paused again. "Contrary to what you might think," Alex said, "I don't *enjoy* killing people, I just do it when it seems necessary. I've got better things to do than look at corpses."

Lamoral found a crack above him, stuck his wrist in it, and made a fist. Hauled himself up again. "Louis wasn't human," he said.

Alex seemed at a loss for a reply, then burst out laughing. "That's just what I tried to tell you!"

"I'm serious. He was some kind of machine."

"Even if true, which I doubt, I don't see that it alters the relationship between us."

Lamoral halted, panting for breath. "There may not be any humans left, outside the Set. What are the titles and lands going to mean then?"

"One Setman more or less isn't going to make much difference in that case, is he?" Cheerfully. Alex went back to hammering.

Lamoral continued his upward climb. Seventy-knot gusts tore at his clothing. He'd thought he'd managed to get above the overhang, but visibility was so low he couldn't be certain. He leaned out into the wind and looked carefully at the rock face to his right.

The hammering came to an end.

Lamoral could barely hear Alex's voice. "Race you to Camp Two?"

Lamoral reached out to his right, fingers probing at the rock face.

"No?" Alex seemed disappointed. "We could have a jolly time chasing each other around the ice field in this wind. It's going to be interesting, seeing which one of us gets to Base Camp and the radio first. Are you going to camp tonight, or are you going to try a descent?"

Lamoral reached off to his right again, found a handjam, stuck his fist in it. He began groping rightward with his foot.

"Perhaps you've already gone down?" Alex said.

There was nowhere for Lamoral to set his right foot. He took a breath, then let go with his left hand and foot. He swung out on the end of his jammed right hand, boots scrabbling at the rockface. He found a ledge half a centimeter wide and glazed with ice. Carefully he put weight on it. It seemed willing to support him.

"You're either trying to steal a march on me," Alex said, "or you're playing some kind of game. Either way, I'm leaving."

There was a pause. Lamoral committed himself to the ledge, unjammed his hand, and roped right again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Au revoir!" Alex sounded suspicious. Lamoral found another handhold and edged right.

He heard no more from Alex. He kept spidering right and eventually got into the dead-end chimney that Alex had abseiled down. Lamoral's face was completely numb. He put down his faceplate and let the helmet fill up with warm oxygen.

He'd gone up this chimney two days before, only to find that the route was completely closed by overhangs, rotten ice, and crumbling rockface. He'd turned back and the party had gone up by another route.

Now Lamoral went down, moving as fast as he could. The wind wasn't as bad but the chimney was full of spindrift and the rocks were edged with ice. He tried not to think of clever Alex, suspicious Alex, waiting with his pistol just below him, at the bottom of the chimney.

Lamoral was at the bottom before he expected it and had no time to experience relief before he saw Alex's anchor, the three pitons that held his doubled abseiling rope in their slings.

He could see that there was still weight on the line. He found the point where the line was at its maximum strain, right as it went over the edge of the cliff. He took his ice axe out of its scabbard, raised it, and let it fall.

Lamoral spent the night in his tent in the chimney, sleeping vertically in two sleeping bags and pegged down by no less than eight pitons. The storm blew itself out about seven o'clock.

He found Alex's body sprawled on the ice field, where it had created an architecturally perfect drift. Alex had hit the rock face enough on the way down to provide a visual certainty that he died perfectly human.

Lamoral glanced up from the body and saw the bright peaks of Nanda Devi, looking down at him like a pair of towering angels.

King Sulejman was a short man, portly and mustached, with a decided resemblance to his distant and unmemorable ancestor King Zog. In spite of the cold in Schloss Worth's deep freeze, he was sweating when he stepped out. He mopped his forehead with a lace handkerchief.

"Yes," he said. "Terrible."

Lamoral reached into his pocket and removed a pistol. Eurydike, likewise armed, covered Sulejman from the doorway. "You will step in front of my portable x-ray machine, if you please," Lamoral said.

X-rays revealed that Sulejman seemed to have no mechanical parts beyond a few dental implants. Lamoral put his pistol away. Eurydike, pointedly, did not.

"We need to talk," Lamoral said.

Sulejman mopped his forehead again. "Yes. We do."

Lamoral took his guest to the library. Schloss Worth, near Regensburg, was one of his smaller castles; he'd given his servants, most of whom he suspected of being mechanical, the day off.

The Indian Air Force was still scouring Changabang for a pair of bodies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Lamoral had taken good care would never be found. He had told them of a plausible accident in a location far away from any real tragedies.

The smell of old leather and fine paper enveloped them. The King sat in a green leather chair. Lamoral perched on an old oak table in front of him. Eurydike stood to one side, scowled at the Pretender to Kosovo, and kept her hand on her pistol.

"What happened," she said, "to the human race?"

Sulejman looked at her over his shoulder and ventured a nervous smile. "Nothing untoward. We haven't been invaded, if that's what you were suspecting."

"So where is everyone?"

"It's your fault, really. They're off in the *n*th dimension. In their pocket universes."

"Doing what?" Lamoral asked.

Sulejman shrugged. "Doing whatever they please. Pocket universes can be constructed to the most stringent specifications. It's become quite an art form. And it doesn't take much energy from our universe to create a cascade of creation in the higher dimensions. Our *own* universe may have started with a single particle, and the hyperdimensional universes are similar. Time can be significantly speeded up. One can journey for centuries—millennia, really—in a pocket universe, then return to Earth to discover only a day has passed." Sulejman looked up. "May I smoke?"

"Certainly."

The King lit up. "People are off having adventures. In their own and their friends' creations. Living in alternate timelines, being deities, living lives of self-discovery." Sulejman smiled. "Quite a few have chosen to live in the Party Set. You should be proud."

"And in the meantime, what's happened to Earth?"

"It's—" Sulejman searched for words. "It's the control," he said. "It's become a nexus reality. A station at which all the tracks of alternate realities converge."

"And the Party Set?"

"Another control. This one for humans."

"The Party Set is the control? In other words, we've become the norm?"

Sulejman shrugged. "Most people have been off populating their own universes for subjective eons. I don't know how many of them approach the human norm any more. It would be nice to have a breeding population should it prove necessary."

Lamoral laughed. "The Doyenne has always thought of us as her pack of dogs. Now the rest of the world plans to keep us around for breeding purposes. She'd be pleased to know how prescient she was."

"Though," Eurydike added, "she wouldn't like her Set being considered anyone's norm."

"The Doyenne doesn't know," Sulejman shrugged. "Who are you to disillusion her?"

Lamoral considered shooting Sulejman then and there. Alex had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schemed and murdered for over a century to be the Fifteenth Prince von Thurn und Taxis, and had died without ever knowing that he could have been Galactic Emperor in some alternate reality tailored just for him.

Perhaps perceiving Lamoral's feelings, Sulejman shifted uneasily in his seat, his eyes on the pocket with the gun.

"How long has this been going on?" Lamoral asked.

"Extensively, only a few decades. Once the technology was available, it spread very widely."

Eurydike looked at Lamoral. "I told you, Lamoral. I told you that I didn't want to consider the implications of my own work. Now you know why."

Lamoral held Sulejman's eyes. "And the automata?"

"They're maintaining the planet. In case anyone needs to return."

Eurydike put her pistol away. "We've always wondered why we've never contacted other civilizations. Perhaps it's because they've gone . . . inside . . . as well."

"I've heard that theory voiced, yes."

Lamoral scowled down at Sulejman. "And what about *you*, your majesty?"

"Me?"

"What are you doing on this planet when you could be off having adventures in alternate realities?"

Sulejman puffed on his cigaret. "My ambitions were never very high, I suppose, and my imagination is limited. As it happens, I've never wanted to be anything but King of Albania."

"Even though your subjects are robots."

Sulejman cleared his throat modestly. "It *does* make the job easier, you know. And I'm afraid I've never been very good at reigning over real people."

Eurydike joined Lamoral on the table. "How many people are left on Earth?"

"A few million. People like me, without any imagination. Old people whose use for adventure is limited. Academics, eccentrics, historians. The Party Set is quite widely studied for anthropological reasons. That was the purpose of the unfortunate robot now resting in your deep freeze. It was recording you for study later."

"Rats in a maze," Lamoral said. "That's all the Party Set is now."

"Forgive me for suggesting this," stubbing out his cigaret, "but that's all the Party Set has *ever* been."

"There has been a very elaborate charade," Lamoral said, "all designed to convince the Set that there has been no fundamental change, that all is as we wish it to be." He looked at Sulejman as if over the barrel of a gun. "Things will henceforth change."

Sulejman was alarmed. "Great heavens! The control can't *know* it's a control! That would destroy its entire purpose."

"The control," said Lamoral, "has the only pistols in this room."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sulejman thought for a moment, then came to the conclusion that silence was the better part of valor.

"Things will change," Lamoral repeated. "The Party Set is going to have to be informed of a few things. They're the inheritors of the planet Earth, and I intend to see they receive their inheritance."

Sulejman said nothing.

"And, since I presume most Party Set stock is now in the hands of caretaker robots, the robots will be instructed to vote out the current board of directors and vote in one of my choosing."

Sulejman blanched. "How am I to arrange this?" he said. "My influence extends only to one small part of the planet."

"Presumably you know who's running things. Inform them of the changes I desire."

"You can't wave pistols at *them*, your highness."

"I can point the Party Set between their eyes and pull the trigger. Think about that."

Sulejman took a long, ragged breath. "I'll tell them."

"Good." Sulejman reached for another cigaret. Lamoral took Eurydike's hand, kissed the knuckles, returned the hand to its owner.

"And now, your majesty," he said, "you will now help me take the late Flight Officer Ram to my VTO, from which we will toss it in the Baltic Sea."

Sulejman shuddered. "If you insist."

"I do. I insist on everything. Remember that."

Sulejman's eyes were filled with resignation. "Whatever you want, your serene highness."

Lamoral smiled thinly. "I think I'm not Serene anymore. I rather think I've become a Royal."

Alex's memorial service took place in the marble-walled chapel of the Hall of Sleep. Mary Maude Mullen, no longer Doyenne, dressed entirely in black, was mourning for much more than Alex.

"I should write a tragedy about her," Unger said. "A verse play. The good queen, brought low by one of her subjects."

Lamoral looked at him. "Why not make it a farce?" he said.

Unger turned, surveyed him carefully. He seemed unusually sober. "Your loss forgives you your sin, my son," he said.

"What forgives you yours?"

Unger thought for a ponderous moment. "Nothing," he decided. "Nothing at all."

He wandered off in the direction of the bar. Lamoral went on shaking hands and accepting condolences. What interesting realities he thought, these intelligent, sophisticated people could create once they were liberated from their current illusion and allowed to construct their own.

Mary Maude Mullen, frail in her mourning cloth and black pearls, was the last. He clasped her black kid hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I hope you will take care of my hounds and bitches," she said. "Managing them is not easy. Sometimes they bite."

"I've noticed."

Her eyes searched his face. "There has been one palace coup, young man. There will be another. I'll sleep till then."

"I wish you pleasant dreams in your icicle Avalon."

"And I am sorry about Alex, believe me. He had promise."

"So he did. I thank you."

Lamoral left the chapel and walked down soft carpets to the Doyenne's—the Doyen's—office. A brass plate had been affixed to the door, with the Thurn und Taxis arms, towers and dead dogs. He gazed at it for a moment, then opened the door.

Behind the desk was his throne, gold and scarlet, removed from the palace at Regensburg.

Eurydike looked up from one of the chairs. Pastel dogs gazed down at her. "That was a lovely service," she said.

"So it was. Pity we can't tell the truth about what happened up there."

"I should like Edwardes' name to be cleared sooner or later."

"It will be. Sooner or later." He stepped up to her. "What pocket universe will you wish to live in, once you have the choice?"

"One in which I am Princess of the Ghegs. I will be quite happy there for the next eon or so."

"Thank you." He kissed her. She smiled.

He turned to the fireplace and threw some logs on the embers. Then he took the poker and gazed at the shelves of porcelain.

This had needed doing for a long time.

The ones that wouldn't shatter he threw on the fire. His gift, and Alex's, went with the rest. Finished, winded and perspiring, he sat on the red velvet cushion and exchanged satisfied smiles with Eurydike.

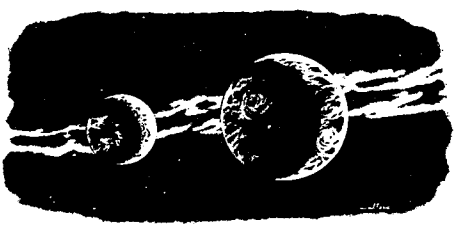
A voice came from the comm unit. "His Albanian Majesty wishes to speak with you, sir."

"Let him in."

Sulejman stepped through the door, feet crunching on porcelain, and froze, looking at the ruin in shock.

Lamoral smiled at him.

"How do you like my doggies?" he said. ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Marketplace

IA MAY/90

ISAAC ASIMOV/ANALOG combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $6.50 per word—payable in advance—($97.50 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box AA-54, Neche, ND 58265.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. All subjects invited. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, SME, 11 W. 32 St., NYC 10001.

CATALOGS & DIRECTORIES

ANALOG CATALOG ON COMPUTER! Complete cross-referenced index to all fiction and fact articles published in ANALOG between 1960 and 1989. 13 different categories listed: Author, Title, Theme, Your Comments, etc. A must for ANALOG readers! (Requires IBM/compatible & hard disk.) To order, send $40.00 (check/money order) to: ANALOG CATALOG, Davis Publications, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

CATALOGS & DIRECTORIES—Cont'd

PIPES, TOBACCO, CIGARS, ACCESORIES. Over 50,000 pipes in stock. FREE 32 page color catalog. Call Carey's Smokeshop Toll Free 1-800-99BRIAR.

STAINED GLASS starter kit. Send for free details. Astrosoft, 15006 La Mesa, CA 91342.

DRAGONS

DRAGONS! T-shirts, sculptures, stationery, jewelry and much more. Full-color Dragon Catalog - $2.00. Dancing Dragon - ANO, 1881 Fieldbrook, Arcata, CA 95521.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME RADIO PROGRAMS. Great Science Fiction! Also, mysteries, comedies, westerns. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Easter, with its traditional four big cons, falls in mid-April this year. There are also on-campus cons, between Spring break and exam crunch. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. Early evening's usually a good time to call cons (most are home phones; identify yourself and your reason for calling right off). When writing cons enclose an SASE (again, say what you're asking about). Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

APRIL, 1990

6-8—**ConCatTENNation, Box 23592, Knoxville TN 37933.** Returning for a second time around.

6-8—**StellarCon.** For info, write: **Box 4, EUC, UNC-G, Greensboro NC 27412.** Or call **(919) 334-5510** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Greensboro NC (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: M. Z. Bradley, Frederik Pohl, Hal Clement, Allen Wold, Richard (star) Preston.

13-15—**BaltiCon.** Marriott, Hunt Valley (near Baltimore) MD. Robin McKinley. 2000-3000 are expected.

13-15—**MiniCon.** Radisson South Hotel, Minneapolis MN. Jane Yolen. Same size crowd as BaltiCon.

13-15—**British National Con.** Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Iain Banks, N. Kneale, Ken Campbell, Page.

13-15—**Australian National Con.** Diplomat Hotel, St. Kilda (near Melbourne). George R. R. Martin.

13-15—**KiwiCon, Box 711, Pukekohe, N. Z.** H. Harrison. For kiwis (New Zealanders) not going to Oz.

20-22—**AmigoCon, Box 3177, El Paso TX 79923. (915) 593-1848.** Poul & Karen Anderson, D. Cherry.

20-22—**VikingCon, VU H-7, WWU, VU 202-Box V1, Bellingham WA 98225.** On campus, "new mgt."

20-22—**SwampCon, Box 14238, Baton Rouge LA 70898. (504) 342-1337 or -5353, 346-1011, 355-8246.**

27-29—**ConFlakes, Box 575, St. Charles MO 63301. (314) 946-9147 or 724-0808.** Effinger, Hamilton.

MAY, 1990

4-6—**Corflu,** % **Eisenberg, 99 Joralemon 6D, Brooklyn NY 11201. (718) 624-0303, 330-5161.** Fanzines.

4-6—**RocKon, Box 45122, Little Rock AR 72214. (501) 370-0889.** George Alec Effinger, the Farrans.

4-6—**PhoenixCon, 1579 Monroe Dr., Box F-218, Atlanta GA 30324.** "Literary SF" con. Piers Anthony.

11-13—**MisCon, Box 9363, Missoula MT 59807. (406) 549-1435.** Elizabeth Scarborough, Phil Foglio.

11-13—**Oasis, Box 616469, Orlando FL 32861. (407) 725-2383 or 295-0228.** J. Vinge, Joe Haldeman.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction,** % **Box 1252, BGS, New York NY 10274.** Hague, Holland. WorldCon. $85 to 7/15.

30-Sept. 3—**ConDiego, Box 15771, San Diego CA 92115.** North American SF Con. $75 to end of June.

AUGUST, 1991

29-Sept. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. Clement, Powers. $85 to 6/30/90.

SEPTEMBER, 1992

3-7—**MagiCon, Box 621992, Orlando FL 32862. (407) 275-0027.** The 1992 World SF Con. $50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS PASS QUALITY TEST, COMMANDER. WHICH 5 DO YOU WANT FOR $1?

WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE BACK PAGE FOR MORE BOOKS

1636 Pub. Ed. $18.95 **Club Ed. $8.98**

3756 **Spec. Club. Ed. $7.98**

1263 **Spec. Club Ed. $4.98**

5876 *Swords and Deviltry, Swords Against Death, Swords in the Mist* **Spec. Club Ed. $7.98**

0752 *Elric of Melniboné, The Sailor on the Seas of Fate, The Weird of the White Wolf* **Spec. Club Ed. $6.98**

1172 *The Vanishing Tower, The Bane of the Black Sword, Stormbringer* **Spec. Club Ed. $7.98**

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN . . .

5 BOOKS FOR $1. Send no money now. You'll be billed $1, plus shipping and handling, when your membership is accepted.

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. If you're not 100% satisfied with your books, return them within 10 days *at our expense*. Your membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive 14 issues of *Things to Come* a year. Each issue includes 2 Featured Selections plus a number of Alternates from the Club's library of almost 500 books. Twice a year, you may also receive offers of Special Selections.

SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Selections, *do nothing*—they'll be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the date shown. A shipping and handling charge is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 1 year to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime. Or you may continue to enjoy the benefits of belonging to *The Science Fiction Book Club*.

HUGE DISCOUNTS . . . up to 65% off publishers' hardcover editions. Some Club books are altered in size to fit special presses. All are printed on high-quality, acid-free paper.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine came late and you had less than 10 days to decide, simply return the book *at our expense*.

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

MAIL TO: *The Science Fiction Book Club*
Garden City, NY 11530

YES! Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Book Club* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just $1, plus shipping and handling.

Please write book numbers here:

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
please print

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

ES643 38

If you're under 18, your parent must sign here _____

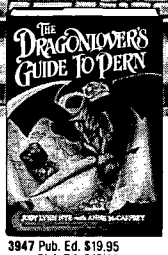
Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application. ISA 5/90

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAKE CONTROL. GIVE US THE ORDER: SEND 5 FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

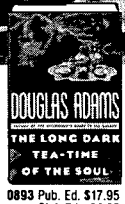
Use the other side to tell us which 5 you want to join with!



3947 Pub. Ed. $19.95
Club Ed. $10.98

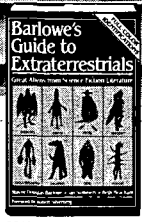
4911 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98

4069 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $9.98



0893 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $4.98

0448 Pub. Ed. $24.95
Club Ed. $14.98



3814
Spec. Club Ed. $12.98

5462 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98

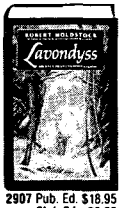
1107
Spec. Club Ed. $7.98

3848 Pub. Ed. $14.95
Club Ed. $4.98

3624*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

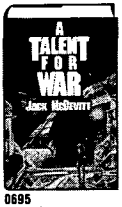
2568†
Spec. Club Ed. $4.98

2311 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $5.98

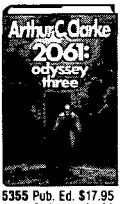


2907 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $9.98

3970 Pub. Ed. $16.95
Club Ed. $7.98



0695
Spec. Club Ed. $8.98

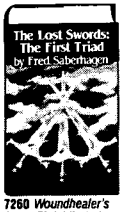


5355 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $4.98

3988 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $8.98

3616* Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98

1420 The First, Second and Third Books
Spec. Club Ed. $8.98

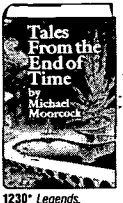


7260 *Woundhealer's Story, Sightblinder's Story, Stonecutter's Story*
Pub. Ed. $45.85●
Club Ed. $8.98

1842 *Dawn, Adulthood Rites, Imago*
Pub. Ed. $52.85●
Club Ed. $9.98

1438 *Sight of Proteus, Proteus Unbound*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

2303* *The Heir Apparent, The Warrior Lives*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98



1230* *Legends, Messiah*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR MORE BOOKS

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

● Combined publishers' editions
* Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some readers

† Copyright © 1989 Paramount Pictures Corporation.
All Rights Reserved.
STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED